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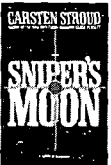
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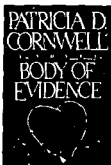
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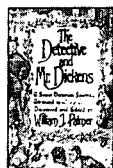
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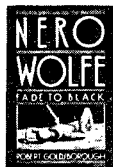
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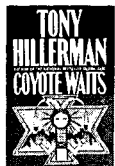
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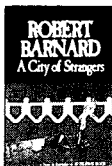
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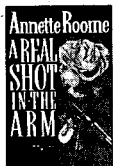
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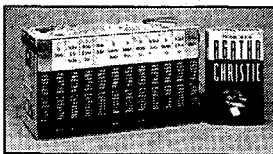
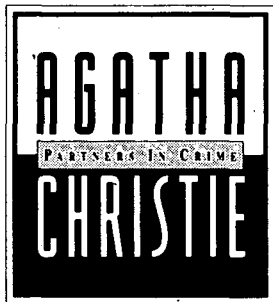
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Every once in a while we get a desperate sounding note from one of our readers regarding the solutions to the puzzles in "Unsolved." "B is guilty" just will not do," they say. "Why is B guilty? How was that conclusion reached? To say 'B is guilty' doesn't hack it."

We know. We're sorry. But a brief statement of the solution is usually our only choice.

As you will have noticed, the "Unsolved" puzzles are nearly always reprinted from some other source. Those sources are varied. Some give complete workings-out of the solutions to their puzzles; others do not.

Further, those puzzle-makers who do present their complete line of reasoning often require a lot of space to do so.

Raymond Smullyan's explanation of the September puzzle, for instance, takes almost a page and a half in his book *Alice in Puzzle-Land*. Many solutions require two or three pages. We just don't have the space to include them even if they were consistently provided.

Finally, not everyone goes at solving a puzzle in the same way. Some people use charts, for example; others a process of elimination; others a trial and error approach. Some of us start with one piece of information, others with something else. So, if we presented one way of solving the puzzle, a lot of readers would be just as frustrated as before.

The only thing we can do is
(continued on page 102)

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Elana Lore**, Managing Editor; **Terri Czezko**, Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Associate Art Director; **Nancy Siwinski**, Junior Designer; **Carole Dixon**, Production Director; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Constance Scarborough**, Manager, Contracts and Permissions; **Elizabeth Beatty**, Circulation Director; **Phyllis Jessen**, Circulation Planning Director; **Christian Dorbandt**, Newsstand Marketing and Promotion Manager; **Dennis Jones**, Newsstand Operations Manager; **Veena Raghavan**, Director, Special Projects; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Barbara Zinkhen**, Classified Advertising Manager; **Judy Dorman**, Advertising Coordinator (New York: 212-557-9100).

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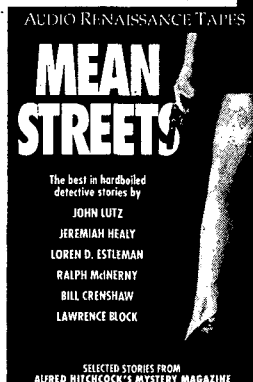
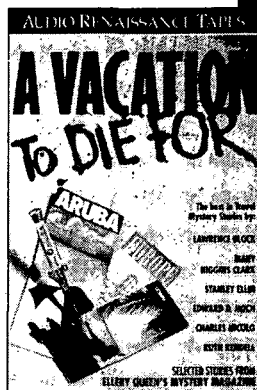
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FICTION

The 730 Club

by Alan Gordon

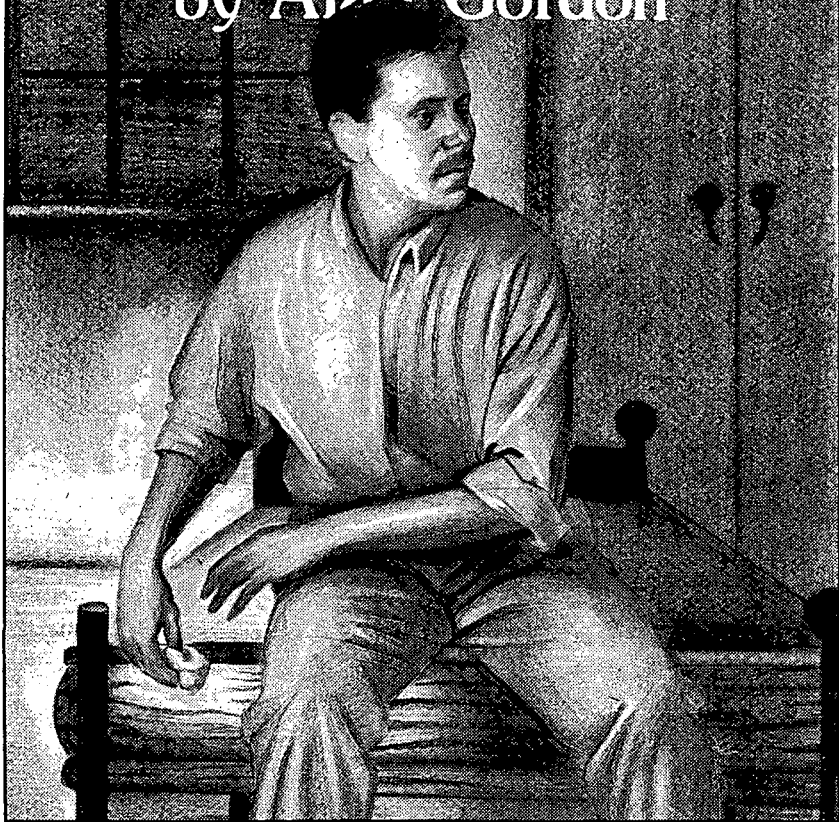


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The greatest thing that ever happened to Downtown Louie was when the New York state legislature raised the minimum on grand larceny from two hundred fifty dollars to a thousand. Downtown Louie was a small-time grifter who took great pains that his various scams, swindles, and out-and-out thefts remained strictly petty. It became a game to see how far he could push it, and he developed into such an expert misdemeanorant that he regularly achieved hauls of two forty-nine.

Downtown Louie had done felony time once, a one-to-three bid in a frigid rural county near the Canadian border, and it was enough to make him appreciate as an occupational hazard the shorter spans that he periodically served in the various city jails. While inside, he had also become something of a legal expert, availing himself of his constitutionally mandated access to the prison law libraries. He soon found work assisting other prisoners in futile longhand writs of habeas corpus and mandamus, motions to relieve their court-appointed lawyers in favor of other court-appointed lawyers, and carefully worded letters to spouses and girlfriends that begged them to drop charges while

stopping just short of violating the orders of protection issued by judges who didn't appreciate just how rough true love could be.

It was during his last stay, over a silly misunderstanding concerning a long-distance phone access number that wasn't technically his, that Louie read the updated amendment to the Penal Law that effectively quadrupled his potential income. His mind churned with scams he had only fantasized about before: the safety deposit key switch, the rigged bingo games in the abandoned church on 115th Street, the fake drug factory that heat-sealed tea leaves and baking soda into baggies. With an entrepreneurial zeal that rivaled the best of the junk-bond traders during those go-go years of the mid-eighties (the Golden Age of Scams as far as Louie was concerned), Louie patiently plotted, and waited for his sentence to end, staying especially model-prisonerish so he wouldn't lose his good time.

Spring was in the air and in Louie's step as he got off the bus from the prison. The midtown traffic jam's noise was a welcome relief from living on the Rock, directly under the final approach to LaGuardia Airport, and Louie breathed deep the familiar stench of the

city that was to become once again his plaything. He marched west until he reached a decrepit tenement in a part of the city that would always be Hell's Kitchen despite the best efforts of the gentrifiers to transform it into a yuppie purgatory. He entered and climbed the stairs to the third floor. He noticed some burly men carrying furniture past him going down but didn't think much of it until he saw which apartment they were coming from. A short, balding, rotund man stood despondently by the doorway.

"Hey, Sid," said Louie. "What gives?"

Sid looked up without expression. "Hello, Louie. Didn't know you were coming out today. Would've baked you a cake."

"Skip it. Where goes the furniture?"

"Into the street. I'm being evicted. Lack of payment of rent. You get only eight months behind, and they start getting antsy. Go figure."

"I'm sorry, Sid," said Louie. "Okay if I pick up my stuff?"

Sid shrugged. "There's only a little bit left. You remember my nephew? The junkie? He stole most of your stuff. Lotta mine, too. The rest is in a box in the kitchen."

Louie cursed under his

breath and went inside. The box was half full. Or half empty, as it had been full when he last saw it and he was feeling increasingly pessimistic. His good suit, the businessman costume, was gone. His marked decks, his fake IDs, his counterfeit gold jewelry, gone. He was grateful that he was wearing his winter coat the last time he was arrested—they were hard to replace, and his still looked clean enough for him to be somewhat presentable. He started to take his belongings out of the box, then, ever-thrifty, took the box itself. It might be useful for running a shell game.

He didn't bother asking Sid for a loan as he left. It would have been pointless, and there were better sources of money, or so he thought. There was a crowbar that had been left by the eviction crew while they were carting Sid's belongings outside. Waste not, want not, he thought as he slid it inside his coat. But as he made the rounds of the neighborhood, he found that the old crew had vanished, forced to emigrate to different parts of the city or ending up guests of the Department of Corrections. His fences had folded their tents and vanmoosed, and the only pawn shop left on Eighth Avenue had become scrupulously legit

when a search warrant executed after long surveillance had placed the owner in jeopardy of losing everything he had.

After hours of searching, Louie was beginning to get worried. He had no qualms about his abilities, but he needed some kind of grubstake to get started, not to mention a place to stay. He briefly considered collecting bottles and cans, but at a nickel a shot it wasn't worth the effort. The crowbar was an asset he wasn't sure about using. His self-imposed felony injunction forbade forcing any building locks. He scanned the cars parked locally but, given the neighborhood, the "No Radio" signs were likely to be accurate, especially since a large percentage of them already had broken windows and popped trunks. He wandered through the bus terminal, eyed closely by the uniforms on duty, and walked down the steps to the subway entrance. A Chinese guy was slumped in one corner, snoring ostentatiously with a dollar peeping out of one pocket. Downtown Louie grinned to himself and surreptitiously scouted the area until he made the other undercovers watching from nearby newsstands and snackbars. Never scam a scammer, he thought.

He moved on to the subway, using a slug from his dwindling supply. There was a line of commuters waiting to purchase tokens. A young black man sidled over to some of them and sold a few below cost. A token-sucker, thought Louie as he got on the train. The lowest. Put your mouth on a turnstile slot, who knows what you're picking up? Not worth it for just a few bucks. These guys don't think big enough. And he leaned back against the seat and felt the crowbar press into his side.

Newton had a similar experience when the apple hit him. It's the combination of unrelated events that trigger ideas in the great. Downtown Louie took a petty theft—token-sucking—and applied to it his appreciation of technology and the big picture. He left the subway at a stop where he knew police activity was normally sporadic, went upstairs, and hid his box of belongings. Then he reentered the station with the crowbar held inside his right sleeve.

The timing was crucial. You hit the turnstile just after the rush hour surge, but before the clerk has had a chance to leave the booth to collect the tokens. Louie eyed the turnstile briefly, then slid the business end of the crowbar into the slot where the side panel ended, and easily

forced it open. Inside was a bucket containing several hundred tokens. Paydirt.

Louie grabbed the bucket and started to run. That's when he found out exactly how heavy several hundred tokens could be. He loped awkwardly towards the exit, the metal handle cutting painfully into his left hand, banging the bucket against his kneecap. Suddenly there was a shout from behind him. A uniform had been lurking behind a pillar, watching for farebeaters. Louie ran, limping, but before he could reach the steps he was grabbed from behind. He loosed the bucket, which went clattering off to the left. The cop, sensing a struggle, slammed him into the wall. Reeling in pain, Louie made his last mistake. Even as his mind screamed, "Give it up! Don't do it," he swung the crowbar blindly behind him. There was a crunch and a scream from the cop, and Louie was free. Cursing himself, he forced his way up the stairs in time to see two other uniforms drawing their guns. He dropped the crowbar before they could justify shooting him, put his hands behind his head, and dropped prone before them. One of them picked up the crowbar, stuck his gun in Louie's back, and froze. Louie closed his eyes and stayed very still.

"Stand up," said the cop. Louie stood up.

"Put your hands behind your back," said the cop. Louie did so, and felt the familiar loss of circulation as the cuffs bit into his wrists.

"You're under arrest," said the cop, and then he took his nightstick with two hands and drove the end of it into Louie's left kidney. By the time he recovered, he was in the paddy wagon heading towards the precinct, bouncing painfully against several other prisoners.

Think, Louie, think. He went over what he had done. Assault on a cop, that's second degree, D felony, minimum two-to-four, max of three-and-a-half-to-seven. Assault with a dangerous instrument, same degree. Serious physical injury? Did he break the guy's arm? Same degree, but if you add that with one of the other factors, is it first degree? That's a C felony, three-to-six minimum, top of . . . He had to visualize the sentencing chart, tracing columns against rows. Seven-and-a-half-to-fifteen. God, no.

And then he remembered with a sickening feeling what he had been doing just before he hit the cop. Stealing tokens. A nice, stupid little misdemeanor, and then he lost his cool and hit a cop. Using a dan-

gerous instrument in the theft or flight therefrom, or something like that. Robbery One, thought Louie. A Class B felony. Four-and-a-half-to-nine minimum, and the max was so high that he didn't want to even think about it.

Louie remembered how cold the winters were upstate and then and there made up his mind to launch his desperation plan. The one he devised while shooting the breeze with the other jailhouse lawyers at their weekly study session. He was dead on the case, he was too much of a realist to think otherwise. So the only question left was where he would spend the time.

When they hauled him out of the precinct lockup to take his pedigree, he was drooling and flopping from side to side. When they asked his name, he stuttered, "J-J-J-Jim," and started crying. They slapped him around some, got nowhere, and gave up in disgust. One of them took his prints, and Louie rotated each digit slightly as the marks were made. The officer faxed them off to Albany, and Louie crossed his ink-blackened fingers and prayed.

He was transported through Central Booking to the holding pens behind the arraignment court. A day later, an earnest-looking young woman tapped

on the interview booth, saying, "You the John Doe?"

He entered the booth warily, trying to view his court file. Even upside-down, he could pick out the Robbery One charge. But the rap sheet looked much too thin to be his.

"How you doing?" said the lady. "My name is Belinda Pressman, and I'm your Legal Aid lawyer."

She slid him a card saying that she was indeed who she said she was. He put it in his pocket. She skimmed through the file.

"First arrest?" she asked, and he gave silent thanks to the gods of scamming. The fingerprints had smeared just enough so that the computers in Albany couldn't match them with his record. He had been re-born. Sooner or later, however, he would either have to cop a plea or get convicted at trial. They would reprint him then, and he couldn't count on the same trick's working again. He decided to stick with his plan.

She had been talking about the charges against him, and he started paying attention to her. "So," she concluded, "we're talking about a minimum of two-to-six for a first arrest, unless I can talk the D.A. down a count. Not likely—he's got a strong case and a cop with a broken arm. You'll be lucky to

get the minimum. So tell me what you say happened."

He looked her directly in the eye and started to giggle. She leaned back, startled. Encouraged, he started giggling more and more until he sounded like a baboon being tickled. She stared at him suspiciously.

"Look, Mister Whatever-your-name-is," she said, "you've got to talk to me." He kept on giggling. "Otherwise, I'm going to have to have you examined by a court shrink to determine if you're capable of assisting in your own defense." He started howling with laughter, and an officer came over to make sure Pressman was all right. She waved him off, stood up, and walked out.

Louie kept giggling as they brought him before the judge. Pressman, standing a safe distance away, stated, "Your honor, pursuant to Criminal Procedure Law 730, I would like to have this defendant examined as to his competency. I have been unable to communicate the nature of his charges to him, or get any response from him whatsoever."

"So be it," ordered the judge, and, after searching for the appropriate rubber stamp among the two dozen or so before him, he duly sent Downtown Louie off to be examined.

The court shrink saw him a

week later. "Who is your lawyer?" they asked. Louie giggled.

"What is the function of a judge?" they asked. Louie giggled.

"Do you understand the nature of the charges against you?" they asked. Louie giggled. The best answer, he knew, was no answer. Sure enough, he was dubbed wacko. And since you have a right to be mentally competent before they try you, they sent him off to the Farm in Orange County to rest and be medicated until they could make him sane enough to send to prison.

Which was precisely what Louie wanted them to do.

Meanwhile, in the expensive office of an expensive lawyer ten blocks south of the courthouse, a powerful and nasty fellow was reluctantly coming to the same conclusion that Downtown Louie had reached without benefit of counsel.

"There's no way you could get the time in federal prison?" asked Theo, the Nut. "I liked the one in Allenwood best. Good arts and crafts program."

"It's a state crime," replied the lawyer. "It's state charges, state cops, state prosecutors using state wiretaps authorized by state judges. So, either you go to state prison . . ."

"Or I go to the loony bin and relax for awhile," finished Theo. He leaned back in the Moroccan leather chair. He was underdressed for such a fancy office. In fact, he was barely dressed at all, wearing only a shabby pair of pajamas that didn't effectively cover a flabby, hairy body.

"Look," said the lawyer. "We've been setting this up as a defense for years. You've been wandering around in pajamas just so we could send you to the Farm instead of prison if you ever got caught. You got caught. You go to prison, we can't guarantee your safety. There are a lot of guys upstate who'd like a piece of you."

"How many of them are there 'cause they had you for a lawyer?" growled Theo.

The lawyer flushed with anger but didn't say anything. He was getting paid too much money to talk back to his client. Plus, Theo had been known to break the heads of people he didn't like.

"I'll be safe at the Farm?" asked Theo.

"Guaranteed," said the lawyer. "You'll be surrounded by nut cases, but they're all heavily medicated. We have enough control over the staff to get you treated right. And in the meantime, we'll find out more about your case. It may take awhile,

but it beats the twenty years they want you to do."

"Yeah," mused Theo. "A lot of their witnesses could disappear very quickly while I'm in. Okay, I'll take the vacation. You stay in touch with Larry. Where do I sign?"

The next day, amidst the hoopla of the tabloid reporters, well-known mobster Theo the Nut shambled up the steps of the Criminal Court to surrender himself on an impressive variety of charges. He had put on a pair of new pajamas for the occasion, and had added a robe and slippers to make it more formal. A 730 exam was arranged, and since he had been carefully coached on what to say, his nickname was made formal and he was sent to the Farm.

As it happened, Downtown Louie, now known officially as Jim Doe, arrived about a week before Theo the Nut. After being checked in, he was examined in two different offices by the two resident shrinks. He giggled at each of them in turn. The first declared him a paranoid schizophrenic and prescribed for him some pills that would make him happy. The second decided that he was a manic depressive psychotic and prescribed pills that

would keep him from getting too happy. Both watched him carefully place the pills on his tongue, drink a glass of water, and open his mouth to show he had swallowed everything. Both of them then sent him away and missed seeing him slip the pills he had palmed into his pocket.

The day orderly, a small, wiry Puerto Rican named Ramon, walked him through a series of doors that he unlocked with keys drawn from the bunch chained to his waist. Once he arrived at the main dormitory, he started giving Louie the tour.

"Showers over there. This wing is for the dangerous guys, the not guilty by reason of insanities. We keep them segregated from the incompetents like you. Cafeteria, you'll like the food. Tastes good, and it's good for you. Gym, classrooms are down that way. You like painting? Most of the guys here paint, art therapy they call it. You paint, then the headshrinkers analyze what you do. Every year they have a show, and people come to see what's what. Rorschach City. Okay, here's your new home away from home."

He unlocked another door and showed Louie into a large, sunny room with several cots set up barracks style. They

were made up with army blankets and looked a little firmer than the bunk beds he was used to on the Rock. There were two at the end of the row that were unoccupied. Ramon guided him to the one farther from the wall and sat him down.

"Okay, Mr. Jim Doe," he said. "This is your bed. You are in Dorm A, Room 3, Bed 9. Remember that, A-3-9. The others should be back from the playground soon. Dinner's at five, medication at nine, lights out at ten, wakeup at seven. You'll get used to it. See you around." He left.

Louie stretched out on the cot and stared at the ceiling, then examined his surroundings. There was a cabinet made from sheet metal next to the bed. He placed his prison-issue clothing inside, then looked for a place where he could stash the pills. He finally opted for the obvious hiding place—inside a leg of the bed. He wrapped the pills in tissue first, thinking he might experiment with them a little when he got the chance, or else sell them once he determined where the black market was.

Just as he moved the cot back into position, the others returned, sounding like nothing so much as a group of schoolboys chattering and screaming on their way back from a field trip, only an octave lower. They

stopped abruptly when confronted with Louie, staring suspiciously at the new face. Louie, staying in character, giggled at them. Four of them giggled back, three frowned, and a very young looking man burst into tears.

"Okay, okay," said the man who brought them in. "This is the new guy, he doesn't know his real name, so we call him Jim. Say 'Hello, Jim,' campers." The gigglers kept giggling, the frowners stuttered over their hellos, and the young man kept crying. The orderly went over to where Louie was standing.

"So, Jim, I guess Ramon gave you the shpiel," he said. "My name is Arnold. I'm the night orderly for this wing. Get yourself cleaned up, it's dinnertime." He held out his hand. Louie shook it, and Arnold abruptly pulled him forward until Louie's face was inches away from his own.

"Now, Jim," he said softly, "I don't expect you to be any trouble, and even if you wanted to be trouble, I don't think you'll be any. You behave, because I've got no problem with disciplining people. You see Jerry over there?" He indicated the crying man, who by this time was listening intently through his tears. "Jerry tried to give me trouble. Now he mostly

cries. Don't be like Jerry if you want to get along with me. And you do, don't you?" Louie nodded, and Arnold let him go.

"Okay, campers, inspection time," he barked, clapping his hands twice. The inmates shambled into a semblance of a straight line and held out their hands. Arnold moved down the line. "Okay, Dwayne. Good, Curtis. Marcus, get those nails better. Very good, Jerry." Jerry beamed like a puppy allowed back in the house. Inspection was completed, and the nine of them were led to the cafeteria.

The food was, surprisingly good, certainly better than the usual prison fare. The room was filled with the din of insanity, with the normal dysfunctional chatter interrupted by the odd shriek or howl. When it was over, Arnold led them back into the room and switched on *The Cosby Show*. Louie noticed that his fellow inmates laughed at all the jokes. They also laughed at the straight lines, the commercials, the news bulletin, and sometimes at nothing at all.

At nine o'clock a nurse came by with a tray of small paper cups and a pitcher of water. She inspected the name at the foot of each bed, handed the occupant the appropriate pills and a cup of water, and watched until she was sure the pills had been

swallowed. Louie did his sleight-of-hand bit again and lay back and watched *Cheers* while his companions conked out. Arnold peeked in at ten. Louie feigned sleep while he turned out the lights but soon fell asleep for real.

The daily routine turned out to be not too bad. The Farm, although secure, lacked the feel of a prison, containing as it did large swathes of greenery that the inmates could roam at will. Louie quickly worked his way into the gardening class and spent many happy hours planting and weeding while enjoying the sunshine and the fresh air. Once a week, he was taken in to giggle at the shrinks but otherwise he found himself left largely alone.

Yet the loneliness was getting to him. He hadn't counted on the fact that maintaining his charade would mean absolutely no human contact on any intelligible level. He found himself eavesdropping on the staff just to remind himself what conversations sounded like. He missed the raucous give and take of the prison lawyers' rap sessions, as well as the day to day support of a really tight cellblock. But he knew that one slip-up in his act would tip them off that he was a malingerer, and he would be zipped back into the city where

judges frowned upon people who tried to evade justice by defrauding the courts.

So it was with a great deal of curiosity that he examined the new guy who took the last empty bunk a week after he arrived. A large, powerfully built man who wore pajamas and a bathrobe instead of clothes. Louie sent a test giggle in his direction, which was received with a growl. Okay, thought Louie. This guy wants to be left alone, and he's big enough to have his own way. Looks like he could take Arnold if he wanted to, he concluded, and he sat and waited for the inevitable confrontation between the two.

But Arnold, to Louie's surprise, treated the large man with deference. He omitted the introductory threats, spoke gently and with respect, and three days later slipped him a pack of cigarettes. Louie's scam detector went off with a loud clang, and he kept a very close watch on his neighbor.

This turned out to be an easy matter, as the large man turned out to be a fellow garden enthusiast. He worked the same section as Louie and went into frequent reveries while staring at the newly-grown sage and basil plants in his care. The herbs and the good weather seemed to improve his

spirits, and one day he actually plucked some oregano and handed it to Louie.

"Smell," he commanded, and Louie inhaled appreciately.

"What a sauce I could make with the fresh stuff," continued the man. "You'd love it. Look, you seem like a quiet, friendly guy." He looked around to make sure they were not being overheard. "I'm going crazy here." He laughed suddenly. "I know, I was supposed to be crazy to get sent here. But that's the point. I faked it. I've been faking it for years. Smart lawyer suggested it, only now I'm not so crazy about the idea any more. Crazy. That word again. I'm hanging out in this cosy place with a bunch of nut jobs, and I can't talk to no one. I didn't count on that. So if you don't mind listening, I'm gonna talk to you."

Louie thought for a second, then said, "Okay by me. I know the feeling, believe me. But keep looking at the plants. We don't want anyone in on this who shouldn't be."

The large man stared, then started chuckling. "Jesus Christ. You're doing it, too. I'm Theo the Nut."

Louie grinned and stuck out his hand. "I've heard about you. Pleased to meet you. I'm Louie DeSalvo. I knew your nephew Leo from when he was a correc-

tions guy at the Tombs."

"Not Downtown Louie?" Theo shook his head in amazement. "I've been hearing stories about you for years. Everybody's got a Downtown Louie story at the social club. I figured if even half of them are true you gotta be the craziest grifter working the streets. They say you only do misdemeanor weight. What are you doing here?"

Louie was going to give him a short version, but Theo pointed out the absolute absence of any time pressures, so he gave him the full story. Theo shook his head when he got to the end.

"Bad luck with the cop," he commented. "Too bad you weren't working for me, we coulda fixed things. So, what lawyer figured this one out for you? I never figured Legal Aid for perpetrating fraud."

"No lawyer. I figured this one out for myself. I was reading the Criminal Procedure Law and finally got to section 730 and said, hey, I could use this if push ever comes to shove. And it did."

"Lawyers," spat Theo. "I'm paying this Wall Street WASP three hundred G's just to have him on retainer, and a petty scammer figures out the same thing in the joint. You should be a lawyer, Louie."

"Don't think I could get by the Ethics Committee interview."

"Ethics got nothing to do with it. They do the same thing we do, only they got a license. So tell me, did you really pull the Murphy game on the captain at the 117th?"

"My finest moment," said Louie, and he launched into a complicated tale that carried them up to the dinner hour.

So the last of Louie's problems was solved. The two of them spent the summer absorbing rays and trading stories, Louie of scams past and Theo of the old days on the loading docks. Sometimes at night, after the lights went out and Arnold had finished bed check and was busy pursuing the night nurse, the two of them would whisper back and forth like childhood friends, paying no heed to the occasional whimpers and howls of their roommates when the medication failed to still their nightmares. Friendships are made in the darkness when there is no one else but the two of you, cut off from the world.

As the summer progressed, Louie noticed that Theo was looking more and more worried. He waited, because you don't press guys like Theo. Sure enough, he opened up.

"It's that lawyer of mine," he

explained as they picked some fresh mint for the kitchen. "I think he and my brother are putting a move on, and I can't do nothing to control it. I can only get visits from my family and the lawyer; I need to get to one of my boys."

"Can you get to one of the staff here?" wondered Louie. "Somebody's gotta be buyable."

"Maybe. Ramon is too straight, he'd tip off the administration. Arnold's working for my brother already. I don't know anyone else here well enough to take the chance."

Louie thought, "Maybe we could sneak in to where there's a phone. Hey, I saw one in the kitchen staff room one time when we were dropping off the oregano. Maybe you could get in there."

Theo brightened. "Sounds good. I'll need a distraction."

Louie smiled. "My stock in trade."

Ramon came to collect them, and they followed him to the kitchen where three women and a man were busy preparing dinner. Ramon was walking two feet ahead of Louie and chatting up one of the women when Louie suddenly screamed and pointed to a blank spot on the wall. He lurched back into a woman who was carrying a large metal container of salad. She dropped it, screaming

along with him, and he grabbed handful after handful of lettuce and started throwing it at the wall, pointing and yelling, "Buh, buh, buh..." The women huddled against the oven while Ramon and the man tried to restrain him. He kept breaking free and throwing salad at the wall, then abruptly burst into tears and collapsed amidst the wilted lettuce and the ruined tomatoes.

Ramon knelt down and almost tenderly put his arm around Louie. "It's okay, man," he murmured. "Whatever you saw, it's gone now, and it won't come back. Easy, easy." He sat with Louie and rocked him back and forth. Louie's sobs slowly subsided. Finally he looked around, then looked ashamed and started picking up the pieces of salad and putting them back into the container. As he did so, he saw Theo quietly emerge from the staff room.

"You okay now?" said Ramon, standing up. Louie nodded, and Ramon escorted them to their dorm. As they washed up, Louie saw Ramon talking quietly to Arnold, who had just arrived for the evening shift. He towelled off his hands and readied himself for inspection. Arnold entered the room.

"Good, Marcus. Dwayne. Anthony, okay. Jerry, Jerry,

Jerry, how many times do I have to tell you about scrubbing hard when you've been playing in the garden?" He cuffed Jerry lightly in the face, and Jerry, cringing, scuttled back to the sink. Then Arnold came to Louie, who steeled himself for the punch. But he was surprised.

"Jim, Jimbo, my boy," beamed Arnold. "Ramon says you went a little crazy in the kitchen. Now, the docs have gone home for the night, so we've made an appointment for you first thing in the morning. In the meantime, Nurse Brown will give you an extra sleeping pill, so relax, okay? No more problems. Okay, boys, let's all go to dinner."

"Whattayaknow," Louie muttered. "The guy isn't always a jerk."

"He gave you a break for good behavior," Theo muttered back. "Besides, it didn't happen on his watch. By the way, I want to talk to you later."

Dinner proceeded without incident. When they got back to the dorm, Arnold sat in the room and watched TV with them. Nurse Brown arrived at nine o'clock with her rolling cart and doled out pills and paper cups of water to each of them. When she got to Louie's cot, Arnold came over to observe.

"Hello, Jim," she said with a big smile. "We got an extra-special sleeping pill for you tonight. Now, be a good boy and make it go bye-bye."

With Arnold watching him like a hawk, Louie didn't risk palming the pill. It was large and blue, and went down with difficulty. They left the room, and she shrieked with laughter at something Arnold said.

Theo chuckled, "You had to swallow it for real this time, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Louie said ruefully. "I should be out like a light in a few minutes, so tell me how the call went."

"I got hold of my boy Tony, who runs the docks for me. He confirmed what I thought was going down with my brother and the shyster, so I gave him a few orders. Things are happening fast, and this is a delicate situation, what with family being involved and all. We'll see how it goes." He paused and looked over at Louie. "There's something I want to tell you before we both conk out here. I owe you big-time, Louie. You're a helluva smart guy. If I get out of this cuckoo house and come out on top back home, I'm gonna make sure there's a spot for you. I could use a guy with your smarts. Nothing that will get you sent up, just good advice for good pay. You game?"

Louie put out a hand, and Theo clasped it in his bear's paw. The drug was kicking in, and Louie felt a sense of calm and happiness he'd never felt before. His years of scamming were about to pay off, he had the friendship and respect of a major gangster who was going to set him up for life. He turned over sleepily and cast a fond glance at Theo, who by then was snoring heavily.

He heard Arnold come in and turn off the lights and started to let himself succumb to the sedative. But something alerted him. Arnold hadn't left the room. He was walking towards him. Arnold stopped at the foot of Louie's bed. Louie peeped at him through almost closed eyes. Arnold continued between his bed and Theo's and leaned over and removed the pillow from under the comatose giant's head. As Louie stared groggily, Arnold placed the pillow over Theo the Nut's face and pressed down.

Theo's struggles, hindered by his medication, were feeble and brief.

As he finished the job, Arnold abruptly looked behind him and saw that Louie was still awake. He smiled reassuringly. "It's okay, Jimbo, you're just having another bad dream. You'll see the doctor in the morning." He reached over,

patted Louie on the shoulder, and tossed the pillow onto Louie's bed. Louie wanted to kick it off but could do nothing more than whimper helplessly as the room faded around him.

He woke to find sunlight streaming into the room and Ramon shaking him. "Jim, get up, we have to move you into another room for a few minutes." Louie shook his head with confusion, then saw that there was already a team of cops snapping shots of Theo the Nut, a still life. One of the cops said, "Where's his pillow?" then noticed the extra one on Louie's bed. He picked it up and sniffed at it suspiciously, carefully placed it into a large plastic bag, and sealed it.

Louie, still groggy, put on his clothes and followed Ramon and his fellow inmates into the cafeteria. Breakfast was a quiet affair for a change and was followed by their being led into the gym where Ramon told them to sit quietly.

A few minutes later, a cop, one of the doctors, and a guy in a grey suit with a red power tie came in and looked at the group. The suit turned out to be a local prosecutor, who seemed apprehensive about his surroundings. He whispered to the doctor, who pointed at Louie. The D.A. went over and stared at him from a safe distance.

"Mr. Doe?" he said. Louie giggled, and the D.A. walked back, disgusted. "What am I supposed to do?" he said. "If one of them did it, and they all could have done it, then he could have done it in plain view of everybody in the room and I couldn't do a damned thing about it. They're nut cases. No way in hell I put any of them on the stand, they could say anything. Or nothing. Or just giggle."

"But we found the pillow on that guy's bed," objected the cop. "And we know he's been violent in the past. Look at what he did to that transit cop."

"Yes," agreed the doctor. "And he apparently had a little episode yesterday, something involving salad. Isn't that right, Ramon?"

"Yeah, but that was nothing," said Ramon reluctantly. "I really don't believe Jimbo did it. He was a model inmate except for yesterday, and I think he really liked the Nut. They always hung together. I don't think it was him."

"Well, it doesn't matter who it was," concluded the D.A. "Without witnesses, all we've got is a weak circumstantial case against Mr. Doe over there, and anybody could have dumped the pillow on his bed. Imagine, committing a murder in a room full of people, and

none of them is competent enough to be a witness under the law. It's the perfect crime." He looked over the survivors of Dorm A, Room 3 as they giggled, frowned, and stared. "All I needed was one sane guy," he commented. "Oh, well." And they left the room.

Ramon turned to the group. "Okay, dudes. Let's play some volleyball."

Louie considered his options. He thought about volunteering his information. Cut a deal: his testimony for his freedom. But there were major problems. If they didn't deal, he would have blown his cover. Goodbye, Farm; hello, Canadian border. And even if they did deal, it wouldn't necessarily work. He could hear Arnold's defense lawyer now: "And isn't it true, Mr. De Salvo, if that is indeed your real name, that you have built your entire existence on deceit, fraud, and chicanery?" Yes, it is. "And you're conning us now, aren't you, Louie?" And Arnold goes free.

That was the part that rubbed him the most. Arnold had walked past him in the night and murdered his best friend, the only guy who made life bearable. And he did it knowing Louie saw him, and didn't care that Louie saw him. And to top it off, he threw what suspicion the authorities had

on Louie. This was intolerable. This was a situation that cried out for justice.

The moment he thought about justice, Downtown Louie knew there was just one thing he could do. Avenge the death of his friend. And with a flash he realized he had one advantage over Arnold, and that was that Arnold didn't know he wasn't crazy. Arnold thought he had committed the perfect crime, a murder in a roomful of crazy people. It would be appropriate, thought Louie, for Arnold to die the same way. Only this time, it would be perfect.

He spent the day spying out the landscape for some sharp or blunt instrument with which he could do the job. Unfortunately, it was raining, so he couldn't go out and filch one of the gardening implements. Nor was he allowed back in the kitchen after the previous day's events. It wasn't until he got back to his room that he saw what he needed. One of the metal bars on Theo's cot was loose at one end. With a little coaxing, Louie managed to detach it. He slipped it under his mattress. It seemed fitting, he thought. Get Theo's murderer with part of the last place Theo had been while alive.

Arnold came in and took them to dinner, taking his usual slaps at Jerry and smirk-

ing at Louie. Louie bided his time. He figured that Arnold would come in at ten o'clock after harassing the night nurse to turn off the lights as he usually did. That would be the time to strike.

They went back from dinner and watched television. Nurse Brown came in at the stroke of nine and passed out their pills. Louie managed to palm his successfully, then leaned back and stared at the ceiling, too keyed up to watch any more tube. He reached under the mattress and was starting to remove the bar when Arnold suddenly strode into the room and marched straight to the foot of Louie's bed and sat down, smiling at him.

"So, Jim, how's everything tonight? Or should I call you Louie?" said Arnold, smiling even more broadly. Louie's blood froze.

"Louie De Salvo, Downtown Louie. Am I right? You see, Theo made two mistakes. He called the wrong boy, and he mentioned you in passing. Tony had already gone over to his brother. So when Theo called Tony, Tony called Larry, and Larry moved up the execution date. But Tony forgot to tell Larry about you until today. So we all have a problem. There are too many people in this room who aren't crazy."

Louie tightened his grip on the bar. Arnold chatted on. "You did a good job fooling everyone, Louie. So good that nobody's gonna care much when you die. You'll be in a grave, and nobody will ever know who's really buried there. And you're just as sane as me." Arnold stood up and walked slowly towards the head of the bed. "Saner, in fact," he said. "Because I like to kill people, and you don't."

"There's always a first time," responded Louie, and with that, he swung the bar as hard as he could.

And missed.

Arnold had ducked the blow easily and with a quick movement twisted Louie's arm and sent the bar clattering off under the bed. Louie butted him in the chin and tried to get away but found himself overwhelmed as Arnold used his bulk to force him down onto the bed. He tried to scream, but Arnold belted him across the jaw, then reached under him and pulled out his pillow. The last thing Louie saw before it blotted out his vision was the same jovial smile that Arnold had worn when he killed Theo.

Louie writhed under the pillow, trying to shift his head to the side, but Arnold had one hand gripping his hair, preventing him. He was starting

to black out when the pressure abruptly ceased. He flung the pillow aside and sucked in as much air as his lungs could hold, then focused on what was in front of him.

Arnold had stopped smiling. His mouth hung open, and his eyes slowly rolled up into his head. He sagged to the floor, and Louie could see a crudely made knife sticking into his back. Louie looked up.

"Boy, I've been wanting to do that for a long time," said Jerry. Louie gaped. Jerry? Crying, meek little Jerry?

"Keep your voice down," whispered Marcus, who was standing by him. "Dwayne, how's it look?"

"Coast is clear," said Dwayne, who was peering cautiously out the door. "No alarm." The others gathered around Arnold and hoisted him onto their shoulders, Marcus barking out orders. Louie watched, dumbfounded.

"Here," said Jerry, handing him a cup of water. He swallowed it gratefully.

"Shoes off, everybody?" Marcus called out. "Good. Okay, the guard doesn't hit this section until five past ten, so we got ten minutes. Who's got the lockpick?"

"Yo," said Curtis, waving it.

"Doesn't Arnold have keys?" pointed out Louie. The others

looked at him, then laughed.

"You're gonna do just fine," commented Marcus as he removed the late orderly's keyring. "Okay, quick march, go."

They scampered out into the hallway and dashed silently past the gym to where the not-guilty-by-reason-of-insanity guys were sleeping. Marcus thumbed through the keys until he found the right one and opened a door.

"Okay, heave ho," he whispered, and the rest of the crew flung Arnold into the room. Marcus threw the keys in after him, and closed the door. They ran back the way they had come and closed the door of Dorm A, Room 3, behind them.

Louie looked at them. They looked calmly back at him.

"None of you?" he said.

They chuckled softly. "None of us," said Marcus. "Well, maybe Dwayne, a little, but only around the holidays. We weren't sure about you, though. You did a good job of fooling everybody. We also didn't figure on Arnold being that gonzo, so he caught us by surprise when he killed Theo. We didn't even know it was happening until it was too late. I'm sorry, Jim."

"Louie," corrected Jerry. A bell started clanging in the distance.

"I believe the animals have escaped from the zoo," observed

Marcus. "That should keep the guards busy and shift the focus away from us. Dwayne, cups for everybody." Dwayne quickly distributed the cups while Curtis poured water. Louie watched as they each produced their sedatives from an impressive variety of hiding places. Jerry glanced at him.

"You better get yours," he advised him. "We should all be sound asleep when they come looking. If they can't wake us up, they won't suspect us."

"Good idea," said Louie, and he took two from his cache of drugs. They climbed into their beds, and Marcus held his pills and cup aloft.

"Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to propose a new member. The legendary Downtown Louie, scammer supreme. All in favor?" There was a muted chorus of "ayes." "Sounds unanimous to me."

"Get on with it," growled Curtis.

"Pills," commanded Marcus, and they popped them into their mouths. Louie followed suit. Marcus saluted him with a mock toast. "Gentlemen," he intoned, raising his Dixie cup. "I give you the 730 Club!" To a man they drank, and then crushed the cups and threw them in the general direction of the wastebasket. Louie lay back as the extra dosage kicked

in quickly, and soon found himself happily dreaming of innocent sheep just waiting to be fleeced.

The uproar over Arnold's death and the breakdown in security in the really crazy wing lasted for some weeks. The investigation of the murder subsided, however, when Arnold's bank accounts were found to have some deposits unjustified by the paltry salary paid to him by the State of New York. Checks were traced, and a very expensive lawyer in the Wall Street area was found in a parking lot in a very expensive car with a bullet in his head that probably came from a very expensive gun. The power struggles in Theo the Nut's old mob played out in their usual violent manner, and the few who remembered about Downtown Louie forgot or took that knowledge with them to unexpectedly early graves.

Meanwhile, the 730 Club continued in its clandestine way. Scamming techniques were exchanged like recipes, and their overt behavior was so good that Ramon was eventually given a promotion for his expertise in overseeing them. Louie was happy for Ramon. In fact, he was generally happy. The Club was the best group he had ever hung out with, and as he watched the foliage change,

he realized that the Farm was as close to paradise as he would ever come, certainly in this world.

And so he puttered happily along in his garden, stopping only to remember his friend Theo when the scent of freshly cut rosemary wafted towards him. But Theo had been avenged.

About a year later, Ramon dropped by the garden with a letter. "Hey, Jimbo. Someone actually wrote you. Go figure, huh?" Louie took the letter with trepidation. He didn't know anyone who knew he was here. But he had forgotten about his Legal Aid lawyer.

"Dear Jim Doe," it began. "I thought you might be interested to know that the police officer who was the complainant in your case decided to move to New Zealand. He is not coming back. I mention this because they can't prosecute you without him. I hope you feel better. Belinda Pressman, Esq." The word "better" was underlined several times.

Louie chuckled to himself. "She had figured him out. Maybe from the beginning. Smart cookie, very smart. He got up, brushed himself off, and walked to the chief psychiatrist's office.

The shrink was startled when he walked in and sat

down. "Mr. Doe," he stammered, "your appointment isn't until tomorrow."

"Doc," said Louie. "The most amazing thing has happened. I'm cured." He wanted to laugh at the expression on the shrink's face, but that would have blown the image.

It actually took a couple of weeks to clear out all of the red tape between him and the outside world, but once it was determined that there was going to be no criminal case against him, the Farm gave up and kicked him loose. As he packed his things, the Club gathered around and cheered.

"Don't forget us," said Marcus, shaking his hand.

"Impossible. Even if I tried." Louie turned to Jerry, who was on the verge of real tears. Louie, to his surprise, was crying, too. They embraced.

"You saved my life, man," he said. "I owe you forever. Let me know when you get out."

Jerry wiped his nose. "I don't think I'm getting out. I never liked it much out there. This place suits me just fine."

"Yeah," said Dwayne. "It has its drawbacks, but it beats all hell outta the Bronx."

"Come on," said Louie. "What about those great scams we came up with? I can't do them without you guys."

"Well," said Curtis. "I'm get-

ting too old for that stuff. Maybe you are, too. See you when I see you."

Ramon came in to escort him through the doors to the bus that would take him back to the city. "You fooled those doctors pretty good, Jimbo," he said. "It was fun seeing them look like idiots. Good luck." He shook Louie's hand and pressed a ten dollar bill into it.

Louie watched the scenery roll by and counted his assets. They weren't much. A couple of changes of clothes, ten dollars, and a pass to a city shelter. He felt extraordinarily tired. Maybe Curtis was right, he was getting too old for scamming.

He got off in Times Square, stunned by how many of his old haunts had been torn down to make room for the new skyscrapers. He recognized nobody. The weather was good, so he walked along Broadway thirty blocks to Union Square.

The bums had been moved out, and a farmer's market was doing major business with the yuppies. He bought a can of Coke and drank it slowly, savoring the taste.

You caught a lot of breaks, Louie, he thought. You coulda been in prison for robbery. You coulda been dead under a pillow. Maybe you should consider making an honest living. He tossed the can into a trash basket, then, reconsidering, retrieved it. He found four more soda cans that had been abandoned by the subway entrance. He took them across the street to a supermarket that had a recycling machine. One by one, he placed the cans in the receptacle, closed it, and heard the satisfying crunch. Then he pushed the button on the right, and a bright, shiny quarter rolled onto his waiting palm. He held it up and contemplated it.

What the hell, it was a start.

FICTION

Confession

by Stephen Wasylyk



Illustration by Timothy Foley

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The arrest reports flowed across his desk like debris tossed up from the flood of crime inundating the city, delayed only for a quick scanning and the affixing of his signature—C. J. Hardiman, Capt., Det.

He signed and pushed one aside and picked up another, the perpetrator's name creating an instant jam that brought the flow to a halt.

Rajah Luzerne Lindstrom?

The phone book of any city would probably yield at least one R. L. Lindstrom. Some would yield two. Or more. None would translate into Rajah Luzerne Lindstrom because only one would belong to a foundling discovered in a hospital lobby, wrapped in a blanket, his head swathed turban-like in a diaper so that the nurse immediately cooed, "Where'd you come from, Rajah?," subsequently surnamed Luzerne for the county in which the hospital was located, and the third name acquired from the foster family who reared him.

And perhaps that might explain the man.

Hardiman scanned the report carefully and leaned back, elbows on the arms of his chair, sighting over pressed-together fingertips, as though drawing a bead at the name—an elderly man with a still-round

face, thinning brown hair, a brown suit, a tan shirt, and a dark brown tie in a pose that might be titled *Study in Brown* by an artist, while labeled as just another portrait of an undistinguished personality by a critic.

Sign the report, place it with the others, and the flow would resume; sweeping the report with it. Or push it to one side and come back to look into it more thoroughly.

Let it go or look into it.

Hell, you'd think he had a choice.

The investigating officers sat before him. Bowers was tall, slim, mahogany skinned, impeccable in the best off-the-rack dark blue business suit he could afford and looking forward to tailor-mades. Already had two degrees and would probably acquire more, as many as he felt necessary to qualify for chief of detectives, as if degrees were all that was required. Unless he was judged, of course, by degree-laden superiors who felt degrees were indeed all that was necessary.

And Keegan. Older. Tough. Smart. Street cop, essentially. Sport coat, baggy slacks, open-collared shirt. Matched Bowers' intelligence with instinct and

experience, which was why they had been paired.

His eyes were bright blue in a flat, creased face, the fine veins in the nose and cheeks the Cainish marks of a bottler. The booze hadn't drowned his eyes yet, but the level appeared to be rising fast lately. Why?

Hardiman knew one or the other must have growled, what the hell does he want now? Their faces still asked the question.

Lindstrom? Both appeared puzzled.

Bowers gingerly felt his way into it in a deep, luxurious baritone that resonated in the small office. Hardiman had often told himself that with a voice like that he could have easily made chief himself.

"Lindstrom? Well . . . ah . . . know the neighborhood, captain?"

The neighborhood. Two churches, Catholic and Lutheran, massive Gothic buoys keeping the residents of a fifty block rectangle from sinking like those in the decimated area surrounding it on three sides; the fourth backed by several luxury condos, the city's art museum, and the river. In the changing city, nothing much changed there, the small row homes handed down like baronial estates.

Keegan passed a hand over

his face. It wasn't a question *he* considered wise, thereby confirming Hardiman's theory that degrees weren't everything, but higher education hadn't dulled Bowers' ability to recognize when he'd put his foot in his mouth.

He grinned. "Sorry. I was thinking of conditions today. The area isn't heavily into drugs yet, but there are a few—like Miller. Small-time sleaze trying to open a new market for himself, only a cut above the kids who peddle on the corners. Lived on the edge and worked the area, putting the word out that if you want something, he was the one to see. Narcotics knew him but had bigger fish elsewhere. Since the law wouldn't harass him, Lindstrom appointed himself a vigilante committee of one. Common knowledge in the neighborhood that he'd threatened Miller."

"Everyone expected it to be the other way around," croaked Keegan. "Thought Lindstrom would end up in the gutter with a bullet in his head."

The bright blue eyes squeezed shut, the face twisted, and a hastily snatched breast pocket handkerchief fanned a host of carefully preserved cold germs into the air as it whipped into place in time to catch the sneeze.

Bowers folded his arms. "What's bothering you, captain?"—the edge to his voice translating into *let's get to the point*.

Keegan winced.

"The confession," said Hardiman.

Bowers went defensive. "Not coerced, if that's what you're getting at. The opposite. We told him more than once he didn't have to say a word. Hell, it wasn't as though he'd killed the parish priest. We wanted to give him every break we could. His attorney told him to keep his mouth shut, let us make the case, plead not guilty and see what kind of deal could be made, but no, he had to do it his way. Said he'd warned Miller twice to take his damned drugs elsewhere, and he went to Miller's apartment to tell him for the last time if he didn't, he'd put a bullet in his head and drop him into the river behind the art museum. To emphasize the point, he'd taken along an old army Colt .45."

"He sure don't look like no John Wayne," croaked Keegan. "Scrawny bastard. But when we checked him out, we found he was a Korean War veteran with his share of medals. Don't pay to screw around with some of these guys who've been to see the elephant, even if they are old."

"Miller was twenty-four, six foot two, weighed in at two fifty," continued Bowers. "Lindstrom is in good shape, but he's sixty-seven, five nine, and was outweighed by a hundred pounds. Miller laughed, said an old man wouldn't have the guts, and came at him. Said he'd take his gun away and throw him out the window. He couldn't have been too bright, but then again the M.E. said he was half stoned. Lindstrom put three slugs into him. The autopsy showed the first was dead center. Miller was dead when he hit the floor. The other two weren't necessary at all."

Keegan sneezed and spoke through his handkerchief. "We told him that overkill wasn't going to help a life-in-danger defense."

That it wouldn't. Given the disparity in sizes and ages, an attorney could have made a good case for self-defense—and failing a not-guilty verdict, one for a light sentence—but explaining away those last two shots would be difficult.

"How did you get to him?" asked Hardiman.

Bowers' baritone rolled again. "Miller was a squatter in a rat hole above an abandoned store on Twenty-fourth Street where no one would give a damn about a .45 going off in the middle of the night unless

it was aimed at them, so naturally no one saw or heard a thing."

"Didn't look like a drug killing," croaked Keegan. "Wasn't stitched with an Uzi or shotgunned. Narcs agreed. They knew about Lindstrom. Said it would do no harm to look him up."

Bowers nodded. "We found an old woman on his street who probably didn't think it mattered when she told us she saw him on his way home just about at the end of the timeframe the M.E. gave us for the killing. When we asked him where he'd been, he said out for a walk. Not very imaginative. Neither were many of his other answers. We talked it over with Lieutenant Pennock and Ortega, the assistant D.A. We all thought a search warrant specifying the weapon was worth a shot. We found it in the house. Ballistics matched the slug and the two ejected shells, and that was that. Don't ask me why he didn't walk five more blocks and toss it into the river. If he had, we'd still be looking."

Keegan sneezed again. "All there. Motive, opportunity, weapon. We had him, so I guess he figured why should he stretch it out?"

Hardiman sighed. "Go the hell home, Keegan, before I begin to think the bad guys

bribed you to infect the whole division."

Keegan grinned. "Good idea. I'll put the word out I can be had cheap."

"I don't understand," said Bowers. "We're satisfied, Pennock is satisfied, Ortega is satisfied, even Lindstrom is satisfied. We screw up somewhere?"

"Why didn't Lindstrom take his attorney's advice?" Hardiman glanced at the report. "Amos Biddle is one of the best. He'd have told him he could work a good deal with Ortega just to clear it from the books, but Lindstrom confesses up front, no deals, even though Biddle would also have told him that the overkill would look bad to a sentencing judge. Does he have a death wish, or is he simply crazy?"

Bowers shrugged. "Maybe he has a guilty conscience."

"When was the last time you saw one of those? Don't misunderstand me. I'm not questioning his guilt. What I'd like to know is why he made it so easy for us. What else do you know about Lindstrom?"

"He lives with his grandson. He was there the day we picked him up. Big, goodlooking kid just turned sixteen—"

"Grandson? No wife, kids?"

"Lindstrom is a widower. And no other relatives. We

didn't call juvenile, even though the boy's a minor, because the neighbor next door said she'd look after him until Lindstrom made bail—"

His voice trailed off, overtaken by a sudden thought. Hardiman smiled. Bowers had never needed everything spelled out. Bail was for those awaiting trial. If Lindstrom didn't know a judge would never let a confessed killer walk out and hope he'd appear for sentencing, his attorney would have told him.

"I can't see a grandfather making it easy for someone to separate him from a boy who depended on him," he said mildly. "Unless, of course, he was one of the odd ones who didn't give a damn."

"Looking at it from that angle, you might have a point," said Bowers.

"I usually do. Otherwise I've wasted a lot of years in the wrong job. I'd like to see more background on Lindstrom."

They both rose.

"Just Bowers, Keegan. When I told you to go home, I meant it. There are a thousand cold remedies on the market, but aspirin and hot tea with a shot of booze work as well as any."

Keegan chuckled. "Okay for the aspirin, but the thought of ruining good booze with tea only makes me feel worse."

More reports, more paperwork. Sometimes it didn't pay to be too good at something. You might be rewarded by being given a desk inside because you were very good outside—especially when being very good outside meant your name appeared in the paper too often. *You get more damned publicity than the commissioner, Hardiman.* Once he'd been the first on the scene. Now almost everything came to him secondhand. He didn't miss seeing what the reports spelled out. Any normal human could live a good long life and never regret missing any of it.

What he did miss was talking to people, asking questions, separating the reality from the acting, although it wasn't acting so much as sprinkling stardust into people's eyes so that they saw what you wanted them to see.

Not that he'd ever criticize someone for doing it. He wasn't above sprinkling a little stardust himself in a good cause now and then.

He rose and looked down into the narrow street below. Warm for early spring; men in shirt-sleeves, women carrying coats and jackets.

An old woman shuffled across the intersection when the traffic light changed. At her

pace, she'd just about make it.

Hardiman returned to his desk. That shuffling figure reminded him he had a phone call to make.

Bowers consulted his notebook only occasionally.

"Lindstrom was retired from a foreman's job for a construction company. The neighbors say he wasn't too friendly. Went his own way and minded his own business. About six years ago, his wife, his son, and his daughter-in-law were killed in an automobile accident on their way to look at a house in the suburbs that the son and his wife were considering buying. He was at work. His grandson was in school. The boy was ten at the time. He's been living with Lindstrom ever since."

"So it is just the two of them."

Bowers nodded. "If Lindstrom goes away, juvenile steps in. Beginning to wonder about that confession myself—"

Hardiman let him talk, considering the papers on his desk, the nice day, and how much easier it would be to get a response from Bowers about Keegan on the outside rather than from across a desk.

"Let's go talk to some people. No reflection on you, of course. I just need some fresh air."

Bowers looked at the ceiling and sighed.

On the way out, the diminutive, panty-hosed, blue-skirted, white-bloused, redhaired civil servant named Monica, who sat outside his office and kept all the paperwork straight and took his messages, held out a slip of paper.

"Mrs. Hardiman called. She said not to disturb you."

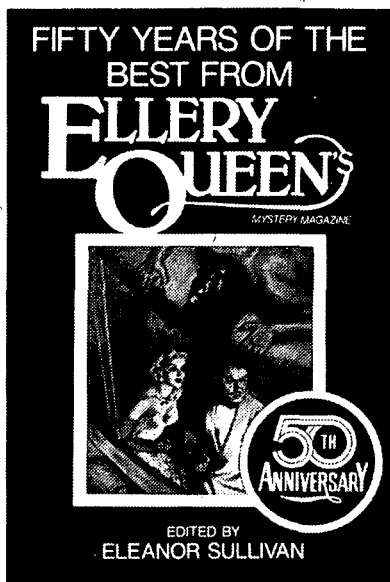
Gallon of skim milk, the note said. Green label, yellow cap. On middle shelf in left rear of supermarket, all the way at the end. Amazing.

His wife didn't consider the great detective she was married to capable of tracking down a damned gallon of milk in a supermarket without precise instructions.

"Arrgh," he said and snatched the slip. Monica giggled.

The witness who had seen Lindstrom was a little old lady named Zementowski, her face square and bony, skin creases honorably acquired through at least seventy-five years of doing battle with life. Her gray-streaked hair was pulled tightly back into a bun. She wore a simple print dress, a worn cardigan, and bulky ankle-high white athletic shoes that seemed enormous at the end of her spindly legs.

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"What?" she said to Bowers. "Your captain comes here because he has nothing better to do?"

Ancient, unreadable eyes shifted to Hardiman. "At least you are better looking than the Irishman."

Hardiman turned on the charm. "He told me you were a delightful lady. What man would sit in an office when he could talk to a delightful lady?"

Her face cracked into a smile. "A woman would rather listen to a good liar than three honest men. Sit down. You want beer? Coffee?"

Both shook their heads.

The chair was probably older than Hardiman. So was the rest of the furniture. The innumerable framed snapshots sitting everywhere, some yellow with age, had fattened many a dividend for Kodak shareholders. One, of a stern-faced man, was apart from the others, centered below a crucifix on the wall. The newest object in the room was a television set with an enormous screen and built-in VCR. Generous kids, thought Hardiman, but she'd probably willingly trade it for a five inch black and white and more frequent visits.

No artistic pretensions or sense of design in a room like this, only a familial love hanging like a physical presence,

the photos more priceless than a spotlighted Matisse or Picasso.

"We wanted to talk to you because—"

She stopped him with an upraised palm before lowering herself into a straight-backed wooden rocker placed near the wide window that looked out into the street. The porch was so small, Hardiman felt he could have reached out and touched someone on the sidewalk below the railing—or across the street, so narrow that parking was allowed only on one side. The dirty red brick of the row homes beyond the cars frowned down at him.

"I will tell you like I told him," she said. "I sit here in this chair at night because my back hurts from the arthritis, and I watch."

The arthritis explained the athletic shoes, thought Hardiman.

"Sometimes I see nothing, sometimes I see much, but always it is better than the silly people and dirty movies on the television. It is also saving the electricity, those robbers. I am sitting here at one o'clock when Mr. Lindstrom passes. I know it is Mr. Lindstrom because he lives three doors away for thirty years and you can see there is a street light in front of my house. What is there about

this you do not understand?"

"Was he carrying anything?"

"What would he carry? A club against robbers?"

Her head canted to one side, and she half smiled.

"What was he wearing?"

"A nice jacket and pants. Always a neat man. You think he is shooting that dope man?"

"He says he did."

Her voice held the smugness of one who knew better. "He lies."

"What makes you say that?"

"If I thought he killed him, would I say I saw him walking? A good neighbor and a good man? No. I would lie, but that is not necessary. He is coming from his girlfriend's house as usual. Three times each week I see him. Always the time is the same."

Bowers made a choking sound and half rose. "Mrs. Zementowski—"

"His girlfriend?" asked Hardiman.

"She lives around the corner. A widow. Three times a week, like I say." Her laugh was almost a cackle. "We are all slowing down when we get old."

"Three times a week," repeated Hardiman. "At the same time."

"Can he stay overnight so the big mouths can have something to talk about?" She pointed a bony finger at Hardiman. "Do

not say they already talk. It is not the same."

No, it wasn't. You could "go with" someone, and whatever went on was your own secret. Stay overnight, and the secret was out, and while elsewhere it might not have mattered, in this neighborhood, still clinging to old values, it did. Some would call it preserving a myth. Even hypocritical. Others would say that appearance still counted for something.

"Lindstrom says he killed Miller because he was afraid he might get the boy involved with drugs," said Bowers.

The eyes snapped to him: "Danny? No." Her face softened the way an elderly person's always does when thinking of the brightest and best of the young. "He has learned well. He is not a worry. Lindstrom thought of the others... the ones who were not strong... like the girl."

Bowers glanced at Hardiman. "What girl?"

She sighed and looked out into the street. "A pretty one. Her name was Beck. It was said the dope Miller gave her was no good."

"How long ago?" asked Hardiman.

"It was a bad Thanksgiving for her family. I am sorry for them, but not too sorry." She made a sweeping motion. "Too

many today tell their children—do not bother me. Go, learn for yourself.” Her eyes swept over the photographs, savoring each, face aglow with the satisfaction of a mother whose children had caused her no trouble and done well.

“Mrs. Zementowski, who killed Miller?” asked Hardiman.

She smiled. “How could an old lady know this?”

“She might have seen someone else walking down the street.”

“Would she tell if she did?”

He returned the smile. “What’s the widow’s name?”

“Colucci. She’s Italian, but she’s all right.” A hand drifted vaguely toward the street. “She lives in the third house around the corner. If she is not there, she will soon be coming from work. You wait.”

“How long have she and Lindstrom—”

“I would think it five years. You will speak to her?”

“Maybe, but when a woman goes with a man for five years, she may not lie for him, but she won’t tell you anything that would hurt him.” He rose and indicated the silent Bowers. “He wasn’t wrong. You’re a delightful woman.”

“Learn from this one,” she told Bowers. “He is a good liar.”

She preceded them to the

door. Hardiman paused, looking at the photo of the stern-faced man below the crucifix. “When did Simon die?”

“Ten years—” She stared at him for a moment before flat hands pressed to her cheeks and her eyes widened. “You *are* him. I thought—it is my eyes—it cannot be—the hair is different—the face—” She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him fiercely.

Bowers’ eyebrows were halfway up his forehead.

She whirled and whacked his shoulder with an open palm as if correcting a child. “You with no manners! You did not say his name, only captain!”

She turned back to Hardiman with a soft smile. “Hardiman.” She pronounced it Hardy-man. “When we would see your name in the paper, Simon would say, see, they are all not so stupid they do not know a good man. I will tell the children. Mikey, he is a doctor. Andy makes money with the stocks, and Clarissa, who now calls herself Claire, has five children who have already given me three great-grandchildren.”

Hardiman grinned. Mikey might save a life a minute and Andy make a million a year, but it was clear that Clarissa, who now called herself Claire, was the winner in the How

Have the Children Done Sweepstakes.

He kissed her forehead. "I'm happy that things worked out so well."

Bowers made the mistake of saying, "Mrs. Zementowski, you didn't tell me about the widow and that Lindstrom walked by three times a week at the same time."

The temperature in the room dropped to freezing. "Did you ask?" she snapped. "When I tell you I see Lindstrom coming home, you and the Irishman ran like—" a forefinger wagged toward the door, and she must have been thinking of Keegan "—like there was free whisky outside."

As they walked away, a stunned Bowers knew the smile that followed them was intended for Hardiman alone.

"It wasn't like that at all," he muttered. "Seeing Lindstrom meant nothing. For all I knew at the time, he could have been coming home from a night shift. When I asked her if his being out at that hour was unusual, she said only fools were out at that hour, so if he was a fool it was not unusual. Why in the hell did she change her story now?"

"Lord knows," said Hardiman. "Maybe she didn't understand your question. Don't worry about it. It isn't the first

time a witness has decided to embellish an answer. You've seen it almost give a prosecutor a heart attack when it happens in a courtroom."

"Girlfriend or no girlfriend, there's still that gun," said Bowers grimly. "He used it—"

He stopped walking.

"Where would the boy be now?" asked Hardiman.

"He has an after-school job at Burger King." Two strides and Bowers caught up again. "But you don't really think—"

"I don't think anything."

"Uh-huh." Bowers' voice was soft. "You didn't say you knew Mrs. Zementowski, captain. Playing with a stacked deck?"

"Wouldn't change anything, and it was a long time ago. I worked this area as a rookie. Simon Zementowski would get drunk every Friday night on his way home from work. An easy mark for a mugger who wanted to pick up a few bucks. One son was working two jobs, the other and the daughter were in high school. They couldn't escort him home, and she wouldn't shame him by doing it. So I'd stop by, collect him, and pour him through the door with what was left of his pay. She never raised her voice at him. She knew something was bothering him because, aside from that, he was one of the nicest guys you ever met. I

found out that he hated his job. He was a maintenance man, which was a glorified name for janitor and handyman, at an office building downtown. It galled the hell out of him to go in and out of those offices, being talked down to by people who were no brighter than he was, and maybe even dumber, but who hadn't had to drop out of school to go to work."

"He isn't the first driven to drink, or worse, in a situation like that. It's called—"

"I really don't give a damn what it's called," said Hardiman. "What they don't have a name for is the people who stick it and work their way out of it instead of feeling sorry for themselves. Like Simon and his wife. When I explained to both of them why he was drowning his sorrows once a week, she took charge. Six months later, she was working in a department store to help Simon start a little repair shop on Twenty-second Street. He never made much money, but he never got drunk again on Friday night. I can't guarantee weddings and funerals. All of which is beside the point. She wouldn't tell me anything that she wouldn't tell you."

They turned the corner into a street wider than the one they left, the homes set farther back, the porches larger.

"If you say so," said Bowers slowly. "Would I be right in assuming you also knew Lindstrom?"

"Oh, I knew him before that." Hardiman's tone was casual. "He was my sergeant in the army." He glanced up. "Third house, she said."

Bowers stopped in his tracks. "You just blew your reputation for straight shooting all to hell. Stacking the deck is bad enough. Now you're pulling Aces from your sleeve."

"Not really," said Hardiman as he mounted the steps. "I haven't seem Lindstrom in thirty-five years, so I have no idea of the kind of man he is today, but the man I knew never made anything easy for anyone. He'd be more inclined to tell you to go to hell than confess, and that was *before* I knew about the grandson."

He rang the bell.

"He did, but not in so many words," said Bowers slowly. "Arrogant bastard. Dictated that confession as though he expected applause."

He glanced at Hardiman. "This may be a stupid question, but since you know him, why don't you simply talk to him?"

"Because, like Mrs. Zementowski, he wouldn't tell me anything more than he'd tell you. Perhaps not that much. He thought even less of me than I

thought of him and used his rank to make my life miserable. I'm sure his opinion of me hasn't changed."

Bowers chuckled. "Then why not let him stew in his own juice?"

"Maybe I'm trying to prove I'm better at this than he was at soldiering."

No response from inside the house.

"She said to wait. Let's just do that. I'll stay here. Why don't you call Monica and see what we have on that girl Beck? Lindstrom didn't shape up as your community do-gooder when I knew him, so maybe something set him off, like the girl dying."

Bowers went back to the car. Hardiman lowered himself to the steps before the house. The fading afternoon was bringing the temperature back to where it should be for this time of year, a little too cool for just a suit coat, but hell, the way he'd been going lately, if he developed hypothermia of the brain no one would notice any difference.

The woman approaching slowed her walk, a question in her eyes. About five five, in her mid-fifties, fashionably set hair still raven black—probably helped by a color rinse at the salon—dressed like a thousand others in what had become al-

most an office uniform: tailored blue suit, blouse with scarf, eye shadow, lip gloss, delicate blush on her cheeks.

He reached for his I.D., rose, and held it out. "Mrs. Colucci?"

She nodded.

"Have time to talk for a few minutes?"

She wet her lips. "Rajah?"

"You knew he was arrested."

A smile came and went. "Many people went out of their way to tell me."

"You don't seem worried."

She glanced at the returning Bowers.

"Everyone makes mistakes, even the police."

"Not this time. He confessed."

Her lips parted.

"The weapon was found in his house."

She sank to the steps. Hardiman felt that if they hadn't been there, she'd have sat down anyway.

"Now, if he was with you—"

"Why should he be with me?"

"Mrs. Zementowski said she often saw him pass at that time, on his way home from visiting you. Was he?"

She looked at him, up the street as if she could see around the corner to Mrs. Zementowski's house, and back to her handbag.

She shook her head, the words whispered.

"When . . . when . . . can I . . . see him?"

Bowers wrote on a page of his notebook, tore it out, and handed it to her. "The first number is the district attorney's office. Ask for Mr. Ortega. The second is Lindstrom's attorney, Amos Biddle. Know him?"

She shook her head.

"Either will help, but it might be better if you called Biddle."

"Are you sure you don't want to tell us anything?" asked Hardiman.

She shook her head again.

They left her there.

"His arrest didn't worry her," said Hardiman, "because she thought he wasn't guilty. When I told her he confessed, it floored her."

"It seems to me that if he'd been with her, she'd have said so."

"Not necessarily. She's confused, and she wants to talk to him to see what he's up to before she says anything at all." Hardiman smiled. "Could be a big argument in that visitors' room. What did Monica find?"

"The girl's name was Cathy. Sixteen. Clean so far as anyone knew. Was talked into trying it at a party. It wasn't that the stuff was bad. It was too good. She died from an overdose. The rest is the usual story. Offi-

cially, none of them know a damned thing, but unofficially it comes back to one kid who supposedly got the stuff from Miller."

"Not Danny Lindstrom."

"No, his name wasn't on the list of the kids at the party. But if she was a special friend of his, it might be what turned Lindstrom into a crusader. Look, why don't you take the car back? I want to talk to the girl's parents and a few more kids."

Hardiman shrugged. "Your case, but before I go, Keegan's been hitting the bottle a little too hard lately. Why?"

Bowers studied a house across the street. "He's all right."

"The hell he is. You know damned well it's going to cost you. It already has. You're too good to buy Lindstrom's confession so fast. Keegan probably didn't want to work at it. Let's go get a drink and let the D.A.'s office worry. You're also too smart not to know that while it may never happen, the day could come when you have to depend on his hand not shaking—"

"Okay." Bowers' voice was resigned. "It's no big deal. His wife has been giving him a hard time about the overtime we've been putting in. Says the money was fine when they were

young. Helped pay off the mortgage fast even if she had to raise the kids by herself, but she's older now and if she has to watch television alone, why does she need him? You know the job's always come first with Keegan. Now he's not too sure he was right."

So that was it. The kids grown and gone, and the house empty. The woman feeling she was entitled to dinner and a night out now and then; if nothing else, at least her husband's company. The loneliness of old age creeping up. And the doubts. Looking into the mirror in the morning and seeing a haggard stranger. Did she really look like that? No wonder her husband came home so late. For all she knew, he had someone younger on the side. Overtime, huh. So she carped and harped at Keegan without really saying why, and poor Keegan, wondering what he'd done to bring this down on himself, dived into a bottle to escape—and Bowers carried him, hoping things would work out.

Loyalty to his partner, not misplaced but not thought through.

Getting Keegan out on time was no problem. Making sure he didn't stop off at a bar on the way home was.

"I'll hold that report until you get back. I wondered why

Lindstrom confessed. I still don't know. There's the widow Colucci. Was he with her or not? And why is he so ready to go to jail and leave the kid alone and subject to the temptation of the world when he supposedly committed the crime to protect him from one of them? When you get back, let me know if you still want me to sign it."

"Me? You're the boss."

"But you're one of the investigating officers. Pennock and Ortega went along with your recommendations. Maybe they should have asked the questions I did, but they didn't and the questions haven't been answered. Furthermore, I'm disqualifying myself from any decision because I knew Lindstrom. We don't want any appearance of impropriety here."

Monica poked her head through the doorway. "Don't forget the milk."

Hardiman grunted. He already had.

Coatless, tie pulled down, Bowers came in and slumped into a chair, legs outstretched. "According to Mrs. Beck and some of his friends, Danny had a thing for the Beck girl, more on his side than hers. We could say that was what set Lindstrom off, but there's another

angle that opens up a new perspective. We know the .45 was the murder weapon, and since there were only two people in the house, if Lindstrom didn't use it, Danny must have. If he had a good reason. It appears as though he may have thought he did. I put him into Lindstrom's story."

"Very creative."

"I can see a scared kid standing there and shaking so much Miller *would* try to take the gun away, more so than Lindstrom, and once he pulled that trigger, scared enough to pull it twice more, even after Miller went down, and so scared he never thought of getting rid of it. Ran home with it. I could ask, but would you like to bet Mrs. Zementowski would never admit she saw him legging it down the street?"

"She's already hinted as much."

"In comes Lindstrom. The kid tells him what he's done. Forget the moral issue of the grandfather condoning his grandson's crime. All he's thinking of is keeping his grandson out of prison but at that point has no idea if the boy is in the clear."

"So he throws up a little stardust," murmured Hardiman.

"Exactly. He knows *he'll* be a suspect. If we show up at his door eventually, he'll give us

the killer we want so we won't look any further. He could get rid of the .45, but he doesn't. He just makes sure only his prints are on it. When Keegan and I bring him in, he switches roles with Danny in the story and gives us a confession that seems to make sense. He certainly doesn't want us going back because there's no telling what we'd turn up, might even find out how Danny felt about the dead girl. So no deals. Get it over with fast. Speculation, of course, but does it sound like a good reason for that gift confession?"

"It sounds like a choice a grandfather would make," said Hardiman. "He'd consider himself tough enough to handle prison and the boy better off in the hands of the juvenile authorities. That part would be right."

Bowers grinned. "If that's why he sang so easily, he'll hate your guts for not buying it, more than he ever did in the army. Your fault we went back so Mrs. Zementowski could give us Mrs. Colucci, who might alibi him, and the Beck girl, who could be a motive for Danny."

"I'll live with it."

"But Ortega won't. He says we should have quit while we were ahead. The confession is now suspect. In good con-

science, he can't take it before a judge because we've turned up the possibility that Danny might have pulled the trigger, and now we can't believe either one. If we bring in Danny and he denies it, we haven't gained a thing, and if he confesses, all we'd have is two confessions for one killing, because *he* could be covering for his grandfather. The problem is that the only proof we have is the weapon. While it says Lindstrom is guilty, it doesn't guarantee it, so until we can tell Ortega which one to charge with what, we have a legal rat's nest and the case stays open. Lindstrom is free to go home and take care of his grandson while we keep working."

"For how long?"

"The lieutenant said we can have one more day, meaning me because Keegan is still out, and then if it's all right with you, we'll go on to something else."

Otherwise known as judicious utilization of manpower and resources, which were already spread very thinly.

"What do you say?"

Bowers rubbed his jaw. "I feel that there's some sort of game being played here, so I'd like to keep it active. Work on my own, if I have to. All Ortega wants is for us to say, yeah, it's the old man, and he'll go with

that. If we say it's the boy, fine. He'll know how to proceed. And I'd like to satisfy myself, when it comes down to it, I suppose." He grinned. "Which one do you vote for?"

"I told you. I'm out of it." Hardiman handed him the unsigned form. "The day you're sure, bring it back and I'll sign it."

Bowers paused in the doorway and looked back at him. "Your old army buddy will be mad at Mrs. Zementowski, too. If it hadn't been for her, he'd still be where he wanted to be—in jail." His deep, rich chuckle followed him down the hall.

Hardiman smiled wryly. The usually astute Bowers had missed the significance of *the day you're sure, bring it back and I'll sign it*.

He wondered how many questions the man who led all his psychology classes would have to ask before he realized what Hardiman had known since those days in Korea—and why he and Lindstrom had never been able to get along.

Lindstrom was a very simple, uncomplicated man. Almost primitive. No subtleties of character at all. Having no shades of gray within him, saw none. What was right was right, and what was wrong was wrong, and he'd done no more

and no less than what he'd confessed to.

He'd told Miller to get out or he'd kill him and then did exactly that. Put three slugs into him because he'd always said it wasn't enough to down a man, you made sure he stayed down. Walked down to his house like a conquering urban hero. Held on to the gun. Stood up when they came for him and said, yes, I did it. And to hell with anything or anyone else.

That was Lindstrom. Head like a rock.

When he'd read the report, he'd thought of all the families he'd seen destroyed in similar situations, thinking that fool Lindstrom hadn't given a single thought to what his killing Miller and going to jail would do to his wife and son.

"Lindstrom? Didn't someone with that name kill a man some time back?"

Not his wife and son at all. Worse. The idiot was throwing his only grandson out on his own at sixteen, without realizing the boy would go through life facing sidelong glances and raised eyebrows, the sin of the grandfather visited upon the grandson with—

"You the one whose crazy grandfather killed somebody?"

Which would be one of the milder taunts he'd have to face. Many would open bleeding wounds that would never heal.

Difficult enough for an adult to handle. Even more difficult for a sixteen-year-old.

The boy deserved better. He needed time—time to mature a little more, time to step over the threshold of seventeen and as far beyond as he could get. Every month counted, because at that age months were worth more than years at forty.

By thoughtlessly killing Miller and then confessing, that one-dimensional fool Lindstrom had condemned him to an emotional prison as bad as the physical one he invited for himself.

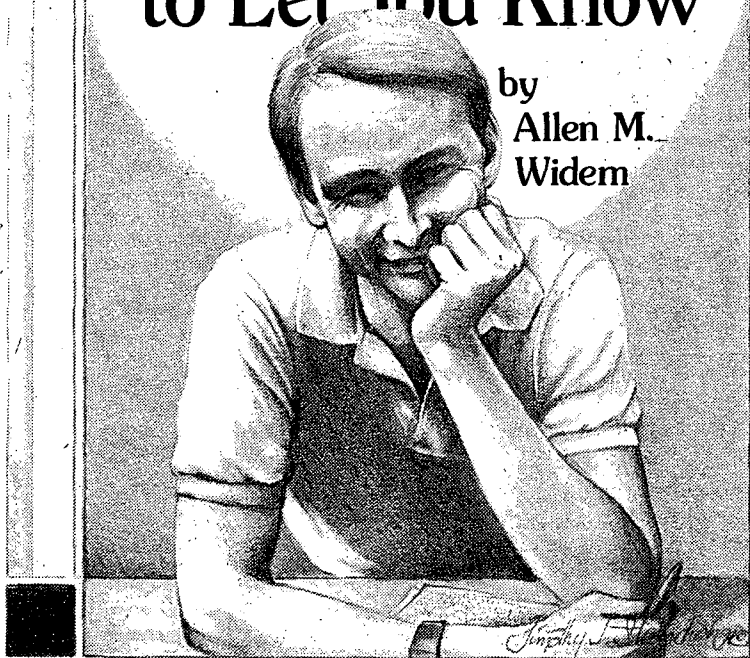
His phone rang, the caller's amused voice ready with the question the moment he said his name.

"When do the two beautiful actresses receive their Academy Award statues, Hardyman?"

Hell, if it hadn't been for the boy, allowing Lindstrom to go to jail would've been a down-right pleasure.

Just Wanted to Let You Know

by
Allen M.
Widem



Dear Stan,
Not that I ever did get to call you anything but Mr. Martin and then always, well, with eyes down to my shoes and heart going whew! whew! whew! because I was usually thinking, what if Mr. Martin decides to bounce me?

But that was Then, and this is Now.

You see, Stan, I'm actually, really, basking in the sun, at least for part of the morning, and then it'll be time for lunch, only before

I go to lunch today, I've got to look over a yacht that Grace feels will be just right for the kind of people we are. Grace, you may or may not know, is my wife.

Oh, Grace remembers *you* all right, Stan. Bad News Martin, that's what Grace used to say when I came home, precisely an hour late usually, past the normal quitting time of the office, and I'd be too tired to have a drink with her when I got home, dinner a relaxing time for others, not us.

I suppose you're wondering whether you could possibly trace me—no, let's put it the way it's supposed to sound, track me down, me with the hundred thou in small denomination bills siphoned off, if you please, over the course of seven weeks, two days, and one bleak Saturday morning (it was raining, you were going to leave for Banff or someplace like that on a Saturday if it rained, I remember you saying).

I learned a lot from you, Stan. And remembered, too.

You had Richard Stephens doing the bookwork for you, and he performed like a trained seal. The kind of Martin man who'd only ask, if you told him to jump, how high.

But you knew and I knew that the company was about to be audited. And then the Hawthorne people came across with a deal you couldn't resist—purchase price of X dollars based on sales projections, even though we both agreed sales projections as you promulgated them were something that couldn't happen in this industry even if the competition curled up and died.

And you had Richard Stephens, a company man like none other, juggle your books, making sure he got small denomination bills, never brand new cash, from the bank across the street, and secreted them away in those expensive travel bags you bought in London or someplace like that for that very express purpose.

Trace me?

Not a chance, Stan.

For one thing, the postmark on the envelope (and you'll recognize the envelope, one of your personal stationery stock, of course). It's not where I'm at.

Grace and I bumped into a cousin of hers, a fellow I'd never met before to tell you the truth, and telling the truth, to you, as you've so smartly put it, is a basic rule in business.

He took this letter over to the mainland and saw it plopped into a mailbox and then flew back here. His own plane, of course. Stocks. Bonds. A real smart cookie, and Grace said when she introduced

us that Hal and I, we should have known each other many, many years before.

About the hundred thou, Stan.

It was your idea to get small bills.

It was your idea to keep the travel bags with the ever-increasing quantity of do-re-mi in the closet of your executive suite, and it was only because you have, I mean had, a habit of keeping the closet door open during the business day, sort of wanting to be close to the money, and only because I got curious, while eating the peanut butter on seeded rye I would bring for lunch (and you at the club for your regular two and a half hour lunch, company tab, of course), that I got acquainted with what you were accumulating.

That Richard Stephens is, always will be a company man is a foregone conclusion. Even with the new owners coming in, I can still see him—him, not you, though, I'm afraid, Stan—taking his morning and evening exercise, walking upstairs, walking downstairs, breathing in, breathing out, and telling you first thing every morning, why, Mr. Martin, exercise is exhilarating.

But you got him to do your bidding, and I'm sure by now that if the new owners have come up with an intensive audit, determining that company books are off by at least a hundred thou, why, Richard Stephens has been, is, or will be *you know* with them. Maybe he'll get a lecture from the judge and then say it was my fault, completely and conclusively my fault. Out of sight, out of mind? Not if it means money.

Knowing you as I did, though, Stan, I'm sure that Richard Stephens is still brown-bagging lunch, you're still going to the club for lunch, and by now, Richard Stephens is siphoning away a new cash cache for you and the new owners have gone on to buying out another company in another town, with you in trusted command of all you survey. With you, absence doesn't make the heart grow fonder.

Crime, petty, whatever, has its drawbacks, Stan.

Even with a hundred thou, less air travel and interim expenses, I've been confronted with a situation only you yourself could understand. And that's what made me write.

I never really knew, never really understood, Richard Stephens, Stan. An exercise nut like no one other person.

Truth of the matter is that with all of the exuberance, ebullience, tied with actually absconding with the hundred thou in small bills,

I've finally come around to counting what's been in the travel bags I took from the closet in your executive suite.

Two-thirds, perhaps even more, is sheer fun-money, fakeroo if you please, and if I were you, I'd get off that thousand dollar chair you're sitting in and hop, skip, and jump down the corridor to the telephone booth you have assigned to Richard Stephens and see what he did with the real stuff, not the counterfeit.

No, I never really knew Richard Stephens.

I know he's a smart cookie! He may well have skipped town by now, and if he has, I'd put out an international alarm for him, a thief beyond description. . . . He's a real thief, Stan.

I can't very well show up in the old hometown again because, frankly, Stan, I don't know if you're getting a whole police force after me or not. Oh, I've had my jollies, starting off this note, saying I've got an appointment to see a yacht. A yacht? I don't have two quarters to rub together.

I'll tell you something even worse than that. Not that grabbing what I thought was a lot of real hard cash and finding otherwise, couple thousand miles from home, is something to be proud about.

Worse?

This fellow Grace introduced to me as a cousin she hadn't seen, and Grace herself?

They took off to buy some knickknacks Grace said she wanted to buy, and Cousin Hal, I don't know his last name, he was holding her hand pretty tight. And that was quite a few days ago.

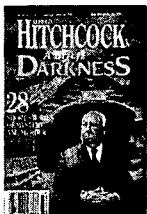
Your travel bags are gone, too. Cousin Hal got 'em, I'm sure. Because he admired my one good suit, the one I'd hung in my closet, and that's gone, too. Grace doesn't know the cash is fake.

I'm in hock for a couple of thousand bucks—suite, food, drinks—and I can't approach the gendarmes around here because you've probably got Interpol looking for me.

If the new owners happen to do another audit, you'll probably leave town. . . . If you get to where I am, don't be all that mad at me, okay? I'll call you Stan, if you don't mind. I hope you don't mind. Just wanted to let you know. You Know Who.

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FICTION

The Gray Asian Sky

by Martin
Limón

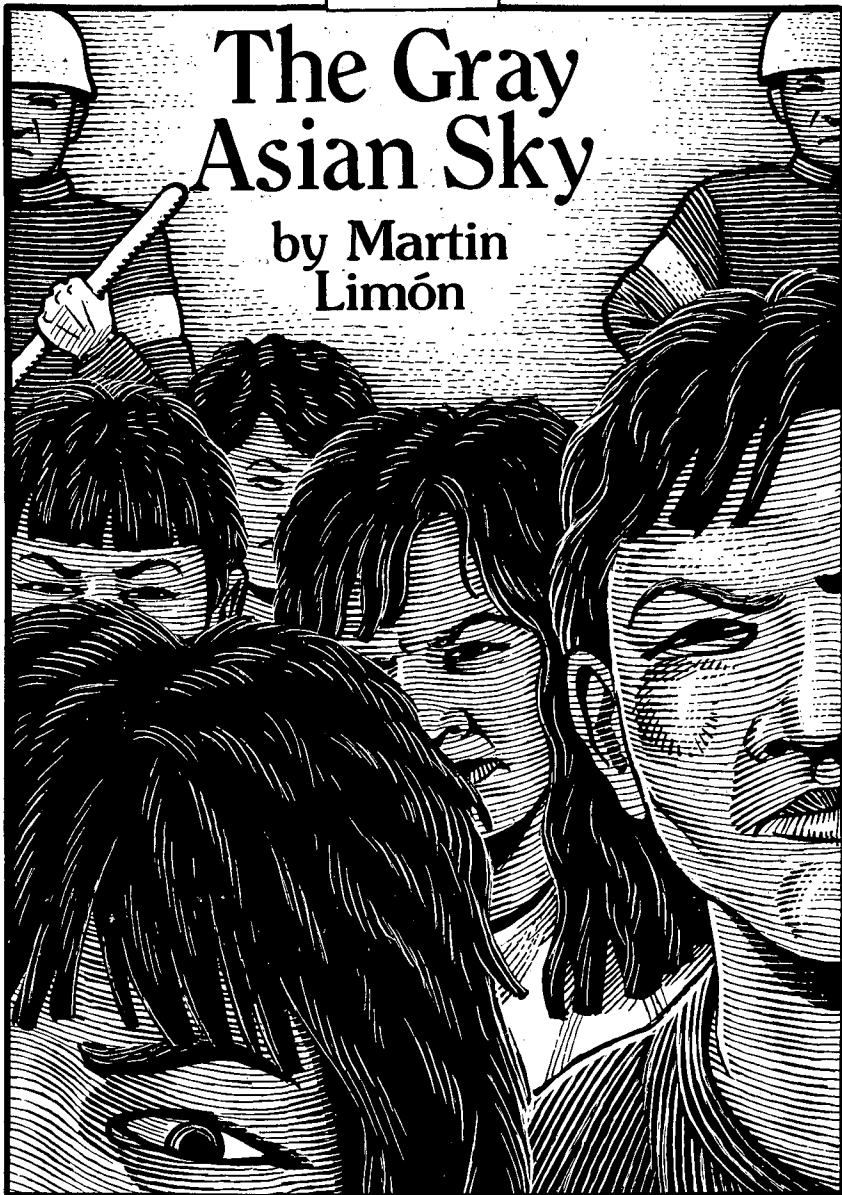


Illustration by Dan Krovatin

52

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Puffed bruises spotted the young faces, and their black hair stuck out in mad disarray. The girls were still angry. The boys just frightened.

In the States a police station full of student demonstrators would have been a madhouse of noise and activity. Here there was an eerie silence. Two of the Korean policemen chatted quietly while another dialed the telephone.

Order. That's what you can count on in a police state. Law if you're lucky.

Ernie and I waded through the crowd to the desk sergeant. He stared up at us, mouth slightly open. I spoke to him in Korean.

"We're here to see the body."

"Of the American?" he said.

"Who else?" Ernie whispered in English.

I nodded my head.

"Just a moment," the policeman said. He got up and strutted into the back room.

The glare from the eyes of the students sitting around us was like forty pairs of laser beams burning into my body. America. That's what they saw in Ernie and me. The country that had allowed thinly veiled dictatorships to rule on this peninsula since we liberated them from the Japanese at the end of World War II. Ernie and

I were almost as disliked in our own military bureaucracy; a couple of flakes, they called us. Here we represented the power and influence of the mightiest country the world has ever seen.

You can't win.

The policeman reappeared and waved for us to follow. Forty sets of eyes swiveled as we walked out the back door.

A couple of policemen and a white-clad ambulance driver stopped their mumbling as we walked into the room. Batons, riot control shields, padded vests, and gas masks hung from pegs lining the walls. Lumpy linen draped a stretcher on the floor.

The desk sergeant stepped forward and ripped back the sheet.

His chest had been crushed, and his face was so purple and distorted that even if he were my brother I wouldn't have been able to recognize him. I kept my face straight. The desk sergeant watched us, a greedy little gleam in his eye.

"Did he have any identification?" I said.

The desk sergeant pulled the sheet back over the corpse, and then he walked over to a metal cabinet and retrieved a plastic sack filled with keys, some U.S. coins, and a wallet. We went back to the front desk where he

had us sign a receipt for the personal effects.

The GI's name was Ralph Whitcomb. He had a weapons card that showed he was assigned to Headquarters Company, 8th United States Army. The photo on his green military I.D. was more revealing than the anguished distortion we had just seen. I showed it to Ernie.

"Seen him around," he said.

His wallet contained four thousand won, twenty-three dollars in wrinkled Military Payment Certificates, and seventy-five cents in change. The desk sergeant accounted for everything on the receipt. I signed it, fitting my long horizontal signature into the little vertical box on the form. He gave me a copy.

"Did any of these students know him, or see what happened?"

"No. Not that they've told us yet."

I handed him my card, inked by the 8th U.S. Army Printing Plant in Bupyeong.

"If they tell you anything, will you call us?"

He clenched his fist. "They will tell us something."

We walked out of the West Gate Police Station, glad to be away from the little room so filled with hatred.

* * *

My partner Ernie Bascom and I had been the only two agents at the 8th Army CID Detachment headquarters when the report came in.

"I want you guys to get over to Chungang University," the first sergeant said. "Fast. There's been an American hurt, maybe killed, in one of their demonstrations."

Ernie was still rubbing his sore arm. The reason we had stopped in the administration office, instead of staying out in the field and pretending to be searching for some blackmarket arrests, was that it was autumn and time for our annual mandatory flu shots. The army's got a thing about flu shots. Every year. And they check to make sure each unit gets one hundred percent compliance. We were bringing our freshly stamped shot records back to Reilly, the NCO in charge of the CID Detachment's administrative section.

A new vaccine has to be developed every year to ward off whatever brand of flu might have mutated into existence in the last twelve months, and the army's a great place to test it. If it kills a few GI's, you make a few adjustments and try again.

Mine felt as if it were going to kill me. I get sick every year

after the flu shot. I'm not sure if it's from the vaccine or from the forced penetration.

My name is George Sueño. Ernie and I had been stationed here in Korea, in the Yongsan Detachment of the Criminal Investigation Division, for the last few months. It was good duty. Ernie liked it better than Vietnam. I liked it better than East L.A.

"Get his name and service number," the first sergeant said. "And if he's hurt, make sure they hold him until one of our ambulances gets there. I'll wait until you call me because I don't want to send a U.S. Army ambulance into that part of town with all those students milling around."

"What about us?"

"You're expendable. Get going."

We studied the big map of Seoul on the wall of the admin office for a minute until Ernie was sure of the directions. Then we hopped in his jeep and made it over to the West Gate Police Station.

The one thing we had going for us on this foray into enemy territory was that our jeep was unmarked. There are a lot of jeeps operating in this country, all part of the generous U.S. government military aid. And as Criminal Investigation Division agents we were required to

wear coats and ties rather than our uniforms.

Of course, with our short hair the bad guys still spotted us for what we were. Might as well hang a neon sign around our necks.

The narrow lane in front of the big stone archway that led into Chung-gang University still glistened with the water from the fire hoses. The sky was overcast and spotted with dark patches of rolling gray. I breathed deeply of the damp air and inhaled the scent of flowers, mingled with the diesel fumes of the just departed military vehicles.

Ernie found a spot in a back alley for the jeep and padlocked the steering wheel to the chain welded to the floor.

"What do you expect to find here?" Ernie said.

"I don't know. Maybe a witness."

"And maybe a lot of angry shopkeepers. The Korean National Police aren't going to like it; it's their jurisdiction."

"Yeah, but it's our GI."

Ernie parked the jeep, and we walked down the roadway. The street was lined with shops, the type you'd expect in front of a college: a florist, a few stationery stores, bookstores with titles in English,

French, and German, a couple of dress boutiques, and a whole bunch of tea houses. Not the type of tea houses that serve crumpets in midafternoon but the type that serve espresso and apple wine and sponsor poetry readings and political rallies.

A few remaining blossoms on a large treelike shrub still splashed the lane with purple. *Mukung-hua*, the Korean national flower, prized more for its sturdiness and beauty than for its rarity. Ahead, beyond the archway, a vast lawn unfolded surrounding stately old trees. The campus of Chungang University.

It was an exciting neighborhood, and suddenly I was overwhelmed with the desire to have parents who could afford to send me to school. Hell, it would be nice to have parents even if they couldn't afford to send me to school.

I shook it off.

There were a few riot police in padded vests and huge caged helmets still hanging around. Mopping up.

Actually, it was incorrect to call them riot police. They are a branch of the armed services, and most of the so-called riot "police" are actually conscripts. The children of rice farmers who are drafted and sent to a few weeks of basic training and

then deployed to college campuses to knock the heads of their peers who happen to come from wealthier families and can afford to attend university. Class warfare. Controlled by the state.

We walked towards them, and when they saw two Americans approaching, an officer in a fatigue uniform was summoned. Ernie and I both flashed our identification.

"Where was the American killed?"

He gestured with his hands towards one of the tea shops. "This way."

The shop was located at a curve where the narrow road crooked like an elbow towards the university gate. A portly Korean woman, her hair done in a little round permanent and her body wrapped in a body-length white apron, rustled out of the shop. Her face was wrinkled in worry. I spoke to her in Korean.

"Did you see what happened, aunt?"

"You mean the American?"

"Yes."

"I saw him. After he was hurt. It was horrible. One of their big war vehicles rolled right over him. Both sets of tires, they say, the front and the back. Blood was everywhere." She pointed towards the gutter. "They've washed it

with their fire hoses, but it was everywhere."

Tears sprang into her eyes, and she shook her head. A gray-haired man, probably her husband, hustled out of the shop and pulled her back in. Other merchants came out into the street when they saw the two Americans with the Korean officer. They gathered around us, and I didn't have to ask any more questions, just strained to understand what they were saying.

"They ran over him and killed him. They ran over anything in their path."

"I saw it, I saw it all. They don't care what they do to these young people. They don't care."

"It's their fault, the army's fault. No one would have gotten hurt if they hadn't attacked."

I found an opening in the hubbub and shouted my question.

"Did anyone see the American fall?"

There was a silence and then mumbling as they looked around at one another. A trim man with jet black hair and a full-length blue apron stepped forward. I figured him to be about forty.

"I am the florist," he said. "I saw the American fall. He was with a small group of Korean students, two girls, two boys. I

remember them because the American stopped in my shop to buy one of the girls a flower for her hair. When the armored vehicles charged up the lane, spewing water, I ran out of the shop. The American and the girl were right here, along the sidewalk at the curve. One of the vehicles took the curve too sharply and went up over it, and as the students jumped out of the way, I saw the American fall forward, very abruptly, as if he'd been pushed. He landed face first in the gutter. When the armored vehicle dropped back to the road, it landed right on top of him. Everyone was running my way and another vehicle was closing in, so I had to run back into my shop."

"Did you see who pushed the American?"

"No. I couldn't. I was too far away, and there were too many people."

A siren wailed and then got louder as it turned down the lane towards us from the main road a block away. The merchants began to disperse, and when the young officer saw that it was a police car he said goodbye to us and trotted back to his unit. Another police vehicle followed, and khaki clad men jumped out and began to cordon off the neighborhood with white tape. One of the policemen came towards us.

"May I be of assistance?" he said.

Ernie answered. "We were just leaving."

We walked up the road to the florist's shop and went inside. The proprietor braced himself against the counter.

"What type of flower did the American buy?"

"A chrysanthemum." He went to a vase full of them and caressed the petals. "A foreign flower. But very beautiful. And very expensive this time of year."

I thanked him and went back to the jeep. Then we drove back to the police station and found a parking space across the street where we could see in through the big front windows. Ernie waited in the jeep while I went in. I spoke to the desk sergeant.

"Did you get any information from the students about the American's death?"

He nodded. "It appears to have been accidental. From a taxi cab trying to clear the area too quickly. We're looking for him now. When we find him, we'll let you know."

When I got back outside I told Ernie what he had said. He snorted. "They don't want to admit that one of their army vehicles killed an American. It's an international incident. All hell could break loose."

"I'd hate to be the cab driver they accuse of hit and run."

"He'll be somebody on their black list."

"That's one way to whittle it down."

I found a pay phone and called the first sergeant.

"Who's the dead American?"

"A G.I." I gave him the service number and unit.

"What the hell was he doing out there during a demonstration?"

"What else? Trying to make it with one of the coeds."

I held the phone away from my ear while the first sergeant expressed his opinions. Colorfully. "The meat wagon's on its way. Make sure they pick up the body and all his personal effects."

"Sure. It might take awhile. You know how the Koreans are with paperwork."

"You and Bascom stay away from those demonstrators, you understand me, Sueño? And get back here as soon as the body's been transferred to our custody."

"You got it, top."

He hung up. Without even asking how Corporal Ralph Whitcomb had died.

We watched a parade of well-dressed, middle-aged Korean men and

women walk into the police station. They stood at the front desk for a while, did a lot of bowing, filled out some paperwork, and then, one by one, they were ushered into the back rooms.

"Payoff time," Ernie said.

When they emerged, their young wards were delivered to them and they left the station. Usually the guardian was scowling and the student stared at the ground.

The girl with the chrysanthemum in her hair didn't have to wait too long. A dapper young Korean man who seemed more like a lawyer than a parent escorted her outside. Clinging to her arm was another college-age girl with short hair and a plain round face. Tagging along behind them were two boys, one of them thin and goodlooking with short curly hair and the other slightly stout, wearing glasses, studious looking.

"That dude liberated a whole pack of them," Ernie said. "Must have cost him a bundle."

"Our young lady of the chrysanthemum has money and plenty of friends."

"The two go together," Ernie said.

The three other students said goodbye, and the lawyer and the flower girl climbed into a chauffeured Rekord Royale se-

dan. He sat in front. She sat in back. I copied the license number on my little notepad, and when they pulled away from the curb, Ernie followed, two car lengths behind in the rushing Seoul traffic.

They turned left at the ancient edifice of the West Gate and traveled northeast towards the heart of Seoul. After about a mile and a half of weaving through traffic, they took a left up a road that wound through a residential area and stopped at a big house on a hill overlooking the downtown business district. Stone walls and iron gates.

"This gal is rich," Ernie said. "Why does she want to overthrow the system?"

"She'll change her mind later."

Autumn is the usual time for demonstrations. School starts up again, and all the students are excited about being reunited with their friends and confident about getting the good grades this year that they didn't work hard enough for last year. And normally—if the government feels up to it—elections are held in the fall. The opposition parties had been getting stronger the last few years. One of their leaders had gotten international recognition after he had fled the country rather than allowing him-

self to be jailed for the offense of having more popular support than the president. Therefore, the ruling party had taken a wise step. They were going to allow elections, but a certain percentage of the seats in the legislature were going to be reserved exclusively for the ruling party. For some reason the students took umbrage at this and had taken to the streets.

When demonstrations are imminent, there's usually a reminder in the 8th Army Bulletin about political rallies' being off-limits to military personnel. In fact, the only political activity GI's are allowed to participate in is the absentee ballot—if you remember to fill out the postcard and mail it to your home state. Other than that, forget it. And Corporal Ralph Whitcomb had made the foolish mistake of getting himself killed in the midst of an unauthorized activity.

The army doesn't mind your getting killed charging a machine gun nest—as a matter of fact they sort of like it—but don't meet the grim reaper at a political rally. That's frowned upon.

Whitcomb wasn't worried about it any more. And the only thing that bothered me was not where he died, but how he died. Someone had pushed him into the path of that charging ar-

mored vehicle, and I was going to find out who, even if nobody else really wanted to know.

Ernie drifted to a stop and parked out of sight. I got out and peeked around the corner. The lawyer climbed out of the Rekòrd Royale, unlocked a metal grating in the stone wall, and rolled it up using a hand crank on the side. Then he got back into the car and they pulled into the narrow garage. The metal grating ground down and clanged shut.

I walked over to the front gate and copied the family's name and address from the engraved marble plaque embedded in the stone wall: Shin, 201-26 bonji, 34 ho, Hyonjodong, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

I walked back to the jeep.

"I'm going to try to talk to her," I said. "If I'm not back in thirty minutes, send in the 82nd Airborne."

"If you're not back in thirty minutes, I'll be gone."

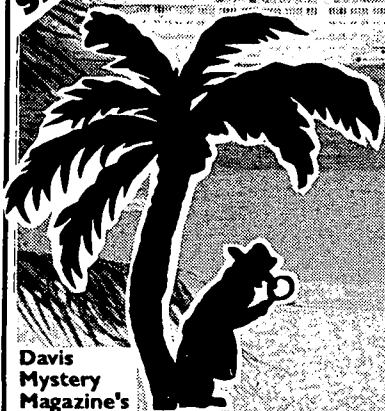
I returned to the front gate and rang the bell. An old woman shuffled out of the house and crossed the garden. When she saw my face, she started calling for someone named Lawyer Hong. He appeared at the door, speaking English.

"Can I help you?"

"I want to speak to Miss Shin. About what happened at

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the demonstration." I showed him my identification.

"Just a moment." He closed the gate in my face and walked quickly back into the house. In a moment he reappeared. "Miss Shin will be unable to talk to anyone for a few days."

"But it's about the man who was killed . . ."

The door slammed in my face again.

As I walked away, I saw a baggy-faced old man glowering at me from a second story window. I hated to drop a dime on little Miss Shin like that. American boyfriends aren't exactly good news to the ears of Korean parents. But it could have been worse. She could have been the one under those tires this afternoon.

I got back to the jeep and plopped into the passenger seat.

"No luck?"

"None."

"Where to?"

"Let's go find out a little bit more about the unfortunate Corporal Ralph Whitcomb."

The Charge of Quarters at Headquarters Company, 8th Army, was unsure if he should let us into Whitcomb's room.

"We showed you our identification," Ernie said. "What more do you want?"

"You need a warrant or something, don't you?"

"This is government property." Ernie waved his arms, taking in the entire three story building. "People inspect it inside and out all the time. Who needs a warrant?"

The little guy brushed his brown hair back and reached for the ring of keys on his hip. "I guess you're right. The first sergeant came through this morning tearing down FTA signs, and last week the dogs came through sniffing for dope."

"If anybody wants privacy," Ernie said, "they better get a hooch out in the village."

We walked down the hallway and the CQ opened Whitcomb's door. The cement block walls of the rectangular room had been painted a pale yellow. Bunks sat in three of the corners with big double door wall lockers strategically placed to give each soldier a modicum of privacy. A row of shoes, starting with a highly spit-shined pair of combat boots, sat under each tightly made bunk. A bikinied Korean beauty beckoned from an OB Beer calendar on a naked wall.

There was no question about which bunk was Whitcomb's. The wall behind was plastered with photographs, many showing him, robust and alive. He

had been about five foot ten and seemed to be always smiling. A shock of blond hair waved over a pair of army-issue horn-rimmed glasses. There were photos of him posing in front of pagodas and shrines and ancient ruins, all places that I'd heard about but had never had the gumption to visit myself.

In some of the photos Whitcomb was accompanied by young Korean women. In those, the backdrop was usually what appeared to be college campuses.

"This guy didn't waste his time or money on the girls out in the village," Ernie said.

"No. Looks like he went after the good ones."

Ernie checked some of the photos more closely. "Nice," he said, "but they're more dangerous."

"You talking about getting trapped into marriage?"

"That, too," he said.

There were more photos in an album and a packet of new ones in a cloudy translucent wrapper.

Miss Shin, without her chrysanthemum, stood next to Whitcomb on the campus of what looked like Chungang University. The plain, round-faced girl and the two young men we had seen at the police station were also smiling

broadly at the lens. I turned it over. Their first names were penciled in, from left to right. Miss Shin's first name was Myong-hui.

I stuck the photograph in my pocket.

"Time to visit a few dormitories," I said.

"You're just hoping we'll run into a panty raid."

"They have those here?"

"They've got them everywhere," Ernie said.

"We ain't left yet?"

We didn't bother with the administrative offices but just asked a young woman, strolling through the campus, where we could find the women's dormitories. She pointed, surprised to see two big Caucasian men on campus. She wasn't carrying any books. Classes had been cancelled for the day.

When we got to the row of dormitory buildings, we started asking young women if they knew the whereabouts of Shin Myong-hui or her friend. I showed them the photograph. Ernie kept picking out the best looking ones to question until we found a girl who was willing to answer. Again she pointed. This time to a two story brick building, and we trudged up some cement steps until a middle-aged Korean woman barred our way. I spoke to her in Ko-

rean, showed her the photograph, and she herded us towards a waiting room with a sitting area, a couple of card tables, and a pot of hot water on a charcoal-burning space heater.

Ernie wandered over to the game room next door and fumbled with the Foosball machine.

She was short and stocky, and her complexion was about the color of a cup of coffee lightened by an ounce of cream. She wore a plain beige skirt and blouse, kept wringing her hands in front of her flat belly, and bobbed her glasses beneath her crinkled brow. I asked her to sit down. The middle-aged woman made sure I caught her long hard look and then turned and marched out of the room.

The young woman pulled a handkerchief out of a pocket somewhere and started worrying it.

"We're here about the American who got killed today," I said.

Ernie padded into the room, pulled over a straight-backed chair, and sat down facing both of us.

I continued. "You're a good friend of Miss Shin Myong-hui?"

"Yes."

"The American, Ralph, he bought her a chrysanthemum today."

The crinkles on her forehead softened for a moment, and she almost smiled.

"It was very nice," she said.

"Were they lovers?"

"No. Not yet. But I think they would have been."

She looked back down at the floor, and the handkerchief wagged.

"Tell me about them."

Her sentences rolled out in precisely pronounced English, and I could see her editing her grammar as she went along.

"I was with Myong-hui when she met Ralph. He was taking photographs, here on campus, and he asked us to take a snapshot of him next to the fountain. Then he asked us, one by one, to pose with him. Later we went to a tea house and talked, and before he went back to the compound, he had exchanged phone numbers with Myong-hui.

"At the time she didn't think she'd ever hear from him again. Mainly she was just curious—about Americans. He was the first she'd ever met. And the first I'd ever met. He seemed nice. I warned her about telling Hei-sok, her boyfriend, but she wouldn't listen to me. She was always so open about everything. When he found out, he was very upset, but he did his best to hide it. He tried to act..." she

searched for a word "... sophisticated about the whole thing. But I know he was very hurt and very angry. We met Ralph again about a week later, and he took us to see an American movie."

"On 8th Army compound?"

"Yes. In Yongsan. And after the movie we went to your snack bar and ate some ice cream. It was very delicious."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. When Hei-sok heard that we had gone to an American compound, he was furious, but he was smart enough not to scold Myong-hui. He knew that she would be sure to do whatever he told her not to do. Today was the fourth time we had seen him, and the second time the four of us had gone together."

"Who was the fourth person?"

"Pak Un-sil. Hei-sok's friend. He is a very good student and wants to start a Department of Confucian Studies here at the university."

"Confucian studies?"

"Yes. He is very upset that the old proprieties are not being observed."

Ernie lifted his eyebrows. I changed the subject before he could get too fidgety.

"Wasn't Myong-hui concerned that her parents would get upset when she received a

phone call from an American?"

"Ralph called Myong-hui at the dormitory."

"I thought she lived in Hyon-jo-dong with her parents?"

"No. She doesn't like it there. She forced them to pay for a room in the dormitory here. She didn't go home very often. Only when she was in trouble."

"What kinds of trouble did she get into?"

"Well, her grades aren't very good. And she's had a lot of boy-friends." Her voice trailed off. "But today is the biggest trouble yet."

I said it softly. "Why?"

She looked up and her eyes widened. "Because now everyone will know she had a date with an American."

I nodded my head. Made sense to me. Ernie opened a new package of gum but didn't offer her any.

"When did Ralph call her?"

"Two days ago. He said he was off today, Friday, and he wanted to meet us and go to one of the tea houses near here. Our tea houses at Chungang University are very famous. Many young people come here for the music and the artwork."

"If there was going to be a demonstration, why did you meet him here?"

"We didn't know there was going to be a demonstration. We found out about that later,

but we didn't think it would be so big. And we didn't think that the army would come."

"Why did Hei-sok and his friend come along?"

"I think he wanted to keep an eye on his rival."

"How did Myong-hui feel about that?"

"She didn't mind. I think she liked the idea of men competing for her."

I pulled the photograph out of my pocket.

"Is this Hei-sok?"

"Yes."

"And this is his friend, Pak Un-sil?"

"Yes. They go everywhere together."

"Is Pak Un-sil your boyfriend?"

"Oh, no." She dropped her handkerchief and turned a bright red. I waited for her to bend over and pick up the handkerchief before continuing.

"It must have been sort of awkward," I said. "Ralph here to see Myong-hui and yet all five of you together?"

"Yes. It was awkward." She sat up a little straighter, her normal color gradually returning. "The only reason I stayed was to support Myong-hui against Hei-sok. But it turned out that Hei-sok's friend was the one who kept making all the mean remarks. About

Americans. Ralph couldn't understand them, of course."

"What sort of remarks?"

"About your impoliteness." She looked at me and almost smiled. "Things like that. Myong-hui didn't like it at all."

"What happened after you met Ralph?"

"First we went to a tea house. We all had coffee, except for Myong-hui. She had cola. Hei-sok tried to act as if he were very rich and insisted on paying for everything. After about an hour the demonstration was starting and some students were making speeches over loudspeakers, so we went outside to see what was happening. Everything was fine until the army moved in. It was funny at first, their taking it so seriously. It was only a few speeches, about politics. I really didn't pay too much attention. That's when Ralph stopped in the shop and bought the flower for Myong-hui."

"What did Hei-sok think about it?"

"He was angry, but he didn't say anything. Myong-hui loved the flower. Instead of spending so much money in the tea house, Hei-sok should have done something like that. Since his money was all gone, all he did was pluck a withered old blossom for her hair. I think that's what gave Ralph the

idea, but she threw the blossom away when Ralph gave her the more beautiful flower he bought in the shop."

"Was this blossom a *muk-ung-hua*?"

"Yes. You know about our national flower?"

She seemed very impressed, which is why I said it. I had paid close attention during my Korean language classes. Might as well get some credit.

"What about Hei-sok's friend?" I said. "How did he react?"

"I didn't see because that's when everyone started yelling when they noticed the riot police moving in behind us. We couldn't get out. It was strange, really. They kept telling us to leave the area, but there was no way out. I wasn't too worried then, there were so many of us, and everyone had been peaceful. But of course the speakers had said so many impolite things about our president. I think that must have made the soldiers angry."

"What did you do when the armored vehicles moved forward?"

"We just tried to get out of the way. Students climbed over fences and ran down alleys, trying to get out of the way. The vehicle moved very slowly really. I'm sure the driver didn't intend to run over anyone."

"Did you see Ralph go down?"

"No. There was too much confusion."

"Where was Hei-sok?"

"I don't know. Myong-hui and I were holding on to one another, trying to get out of the way. We didn't even see what happened to Ralph. It was only later that we heard about it."

"Does Hei-sok live on campus?"

"Yes. In the first men's dormitory."

I put my hand in the right pocket of my coat, Ernie's cue to take over the interrogation.

"Young lady," he said, "do you love Myong-hui?"

She seemed to be surprised that Ernie could speak. "She is my best friend."

"And you'd want to protect her, wouldn't you, from ruining her life by becoming involved with a foreigner?"

"I think it would be best to marry a Korean," she said, and then her mouth fell open. "You think that I..."

"Where were you when Whitcomb went down?"

"I told you. We were trying to get away. It was an accident. He must have fallen."

"This Hei-sok, does he study tae kwon do?"

"No. He is very frail. He could not have done anything like that."

And then she dropped her head into her lap and she was crying.

My face felt feverish by now, the flu shot was getting to me, but I took a breath of the garden-scented air and the dizziness subsided a little.

We had to ask directions a couple of times, but gradually we made our way to the boys' dormitory on the other side of the campus. The boys in the waiting room looked at us suspiciously, but soon shouts were ringing up the big cement hallways for Li Hei-sok. He looked thin and frightened, and there were still scratches on his neck from where a policeman must have collared him. We walked with him into the game room, getting as far away as possible from a pair of students slamming a small white globe at one another in a vicious round of Ping-Pong.

Ernie backed him into a corner.

"You pushed him," he said. "You pushed Whitcomb, he fell, and then the armored vehicle ran over him. And we're here to take you in."

He looked at me, confused. I translated what Ernie had said into Korean.

"No," he said. "It didn't happen that way. I didn't do it. You don't understand."

He fell back against the wall, clutched his stomach, and looked about him for support. The Ping-Pong ball careened back and forth.

Some of the other young men noticed Hei-sok's frantic face and wandered over. Just curiosity so far, but I wondered if the hot emotions of the morning would carry over into the dismal afternoon. My fever came back.

When I heard the slam, I almost jumped out of my suit.

The word propriety flashed through my mind, and I remembered my old Korean language teacher slamming his pointer down on the desk, explaining the cardinal rules of Confucian propriety, and I cursed myself for not seeing it earlier.

It was a baseball bat, coming down flush on the Ping-Pong table. The little guy with glasses in the photograph, the stocky little guy, the one Myong-hui's friend had said was named Pak Un-sil, stood before us. His breath came hard, and he had a white bandana tied around his forehead. Indecipherable Chinese characters in red ink were slashed across the bandana. He spit as he screamed, but I could pick up most of what he was saying.

"Don't touch him, you fornicating foreign dogs! You've ru-

ined enough here in our country. Whitcomb deserved what happened to him. I pushed him, and I'd push him again!"

He slammed the baseball bat back down on the Ping-Pong table. For effect. It was certainly getting that. I was dizzy and feverish, only from the flu shot, I hoped.

"Whitcomb was trying to get Myong-hui, even though he knew that she was Hei-sok's girlfriend. He bought her a flower and presented it to her right in front of all of us. He didn't care who was embarrassed. He didn't care about his own face, and he didn't care about any of us. He just wanted her. To use her and then throw her away. Like he threw away our national flower. I would not let him insult Koreans that way."

Ernie backed away from the cowering Li Hei-sok, and we both took a couple of steps away from each other so if Pak Un-sil went for one of us, the other would be able to get him from behind. I saw Ernie glance at a chair he could grab if the kid lunged. I was ready to turn over the Ping-Pong table.

A crowd gathered, at a respectful distance. Nobody wanted to get too near a looney with a baseball bat.

The young man slammed his bat onto the top of the

Ping-Pong table again. It rattled. He slammed the bat again, and the table gave up and caved in. Splinters flew everywhere. Ernie lifted the chair, like a lion tamer, and charged. The kid swung and almost knocked the chair out of Ernie's hands. I pounced on the kid's back, grabbing for his arms, and then Ernie got a grip on the bat. The three of us waltzed around the room a couple of times, sweating and cursing, until Ernie ripped the bat from the young man's hands.

He was still cursing, frothing at the mouth, and he tried to bite me. I let go and then the other kids were around us, everyone pushing and shouting, and the stocky kid broke away and darted upstairs.

Ernie and I wrestled ourselves free and ran after him.

I heard his footsteps pounding up past the second floor landing and on up to the third floor. Wood rattled, and when we got to the top I saw his sneakers disappearing through a trapdoor in the ceiling. Ernie went first. He pushed the door up carefully, ready to drop back quickly if the kid had found another bat. The coast was clear, and when he was up, I scrambled up after him.

We were on the roof of the big dorm, eternity looming above us, domed by a vast gray sky. No

sign of the kid. Ernie pointed towards the stone spire. He was climbing up. Over gargoyles. Like a crazed Oriental Quasimodo. We ran over and started shouting at him to come down. Wasting our breath.

"I'm not going up there," Ernie said. "No way."

More students came up on the roof and stood around gawking. They cupped their hands around their mouths and started to shout. The kid kept climbing.

When he reached the top of the spire, he straddled the pinnacle and stood straight up, his arms outstretched. He looked fragile up there, against the gray Asian sky.

A wave of nausea ran through me. Whether it was from the flu shot or from the heights or from the desperate young man wavering above me, I couldn't be sure. I have never been sure.

More students gathered down below in front of the dormitory, and I heard their distant cries.

I decided I had to try, and I

walked towards the spire. I found a handhold, braced myself, and looked up.

The young man's arms were outstretched, and his eyes closed for a moment as if he were praying. Then his knees flexed and he pushed himself forward, and for a few brief seconds he was flying. Until it turned into a fall.

I can still hear the crunch and the screams.

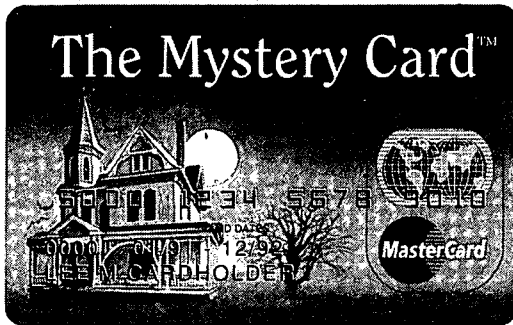
The line-of-duty investigation determined that since Corporal Ralph Whitcomb had died as a result of unauthorized activities, his parents were ineligible to draw his serviceman's group life insurance. Eighth Army put out a special bulletin reminding everyone to stay away from political rallies of any sort—especially student demonstrations.

Whitcomb was, however, authorized a headstone by the Veteran's Administration, which is a separate governmental agency.

It took two days' worth of brandy to get rid of my flu.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

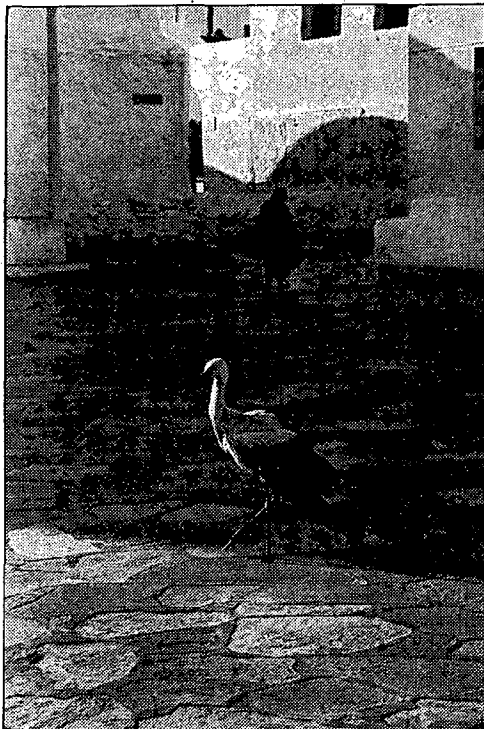


Photo by Alimantas Kezys

Probably an enchanting old town. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10168-0035. Please label your entry "October Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the May Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 155.

FICTION

A Killing at Saint Peter's Gate

by Herb Henson

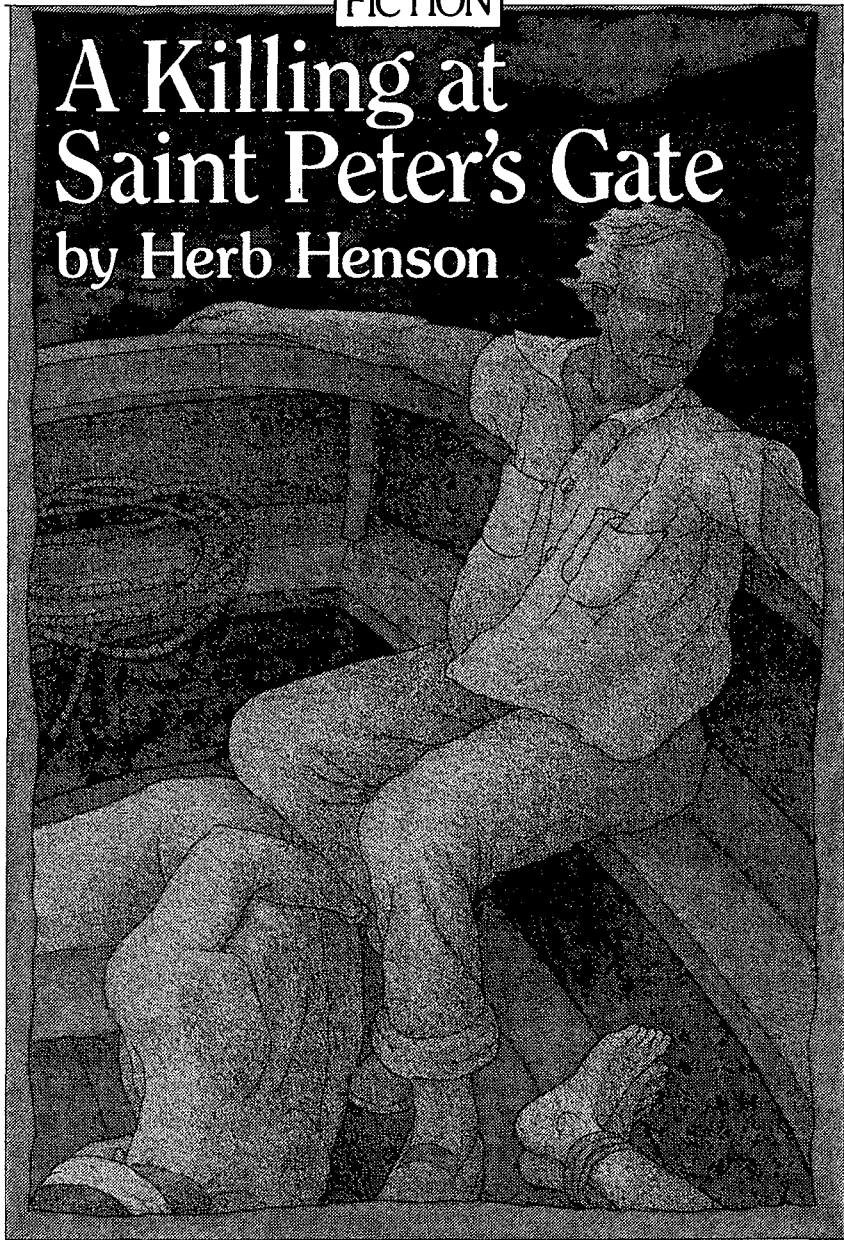


Illustration by Jim Adams

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Willis Barney's trouble with the navy began with the murder.

Now, a week later, everyone in Saint Peter's Gate was threatened. Tonight he would fight back. But the weather could spoil his plans. Black clouds screened the moon and stars; the bay rolled restlessly; the breeze carried an unfamiliar touch of cold. The storm, when it hit, would make the bay too rough to navigate in a small boat. "Where are they?" he muttered impatiently.

Angus MacMurrough shrugged and worked the bolt of the old Springfield infantry rifle, checking its action. He was anxious, too.

The two men stood behind a rock and brush outcropping by the road, waiting. On the beach below them, barely discernible in the dark, an outrigger boat and native boatman also waited. It was late, and traffic on the road was light. Barney was sure the next vehicle to come along would be the one they were waiting for. To the north he could see the village. At this distance it was merely a sprinkling of lights beside an invisible beach.

Then he saw them: a pair of lights moving away from the village, heading their way. "Here they come," he said. MacMurrough nodded. Both

men pulled stocking masks over their faces. It would take the jeepney several minutes to negotiate the winding road from the village to where they were hidden. Barney's stomach tightened. No matter. He knew his nerves would steady up. He was ready.

Events leading to Barney and MacMurrough's roadside vigil began three days after the murder. Barney had been doing his bookwork, ledgers spread out before him on the bar, when the navy staff car pulled off the blacktop and crunched to a stop in front of "Barney's Place." The driver, a young woman, got out of the car and marched purposefully toward the open front of the tavern. As she approached, he watched her surreptitiously over the top of his reading glasses. Her brown hair was cropped short, her figure was trim, and she carried herself straight and sure. Even in civilian slacks and blouse she looked like what he was certain she was—a naval officer on official business.

She stopped in the shade by the entrance for a few moments, her eyes sweeping the interior of the bar, taking in the ships' plaques mounted on thatch walls, the worn pool tables, the fifties-style jukebox. A sailor's place. It was early yet;

there were no customers. Her inspection completed, she turned to Barney. "I'm Agent Sandra Drewett, Naval Investigative Service," she said, flashing an I.D. card. Her voice was firm, confident. "Are you Chief Petty Officer Barney?"

"I used to be," he said, slipping off his glasses. He studied her face: expressionless—no hint of her business there—but in her eyes—eyes as deep blue and icy cold as the Arctic seas he had sailed—he saw trouble. She was appraising him, too; he had a feeling she wasn't impressed. He was suddenly conscious of the ragged shorts and shirt he wore, of his too-long hair, of the whiskers he hadn't gotten around to shaving off.

"I'm investigating the murder of Petty Officer Second Class Raymond Robbins," she said. "I believe you're the person who found his body on the beach near here?"

"That's right," Barney said. He had hoped the cursory investigation by the local police would be the end of it. Evidently not. Resignedly, he folded the ledgers and put them on the shelf under the bar. "We can talk on the patio out back," he said. "We won't be bothered by customers out there." Actually, he wanted to get her out of sight. The mere rumor of an NIS agent's having been here

was enough to keep the sailors—his customers—away.

Bead curtains at the back of the barroom concealed a doorway that opened onto the patio—a slab of cement shaded by rusty panels of corrugated iron. There were rattan tables and chairs, and a barbecue made from a fifty-gallon oil drum. A narrow strip of beach edged up to the cement. Beyond, Subic Bay glittered like a mirror in the morning sunlight, framed by green mountains and the distant blue line of the South China Sea. Offshore, outrigger fishing boats drifted in the current, trailing nets supported by bobbing rows of white floats. Farther away, to the south, several navy oilers were anchored in the channel between the sprawling naval base and the recreation park on Grande Island, near the mouth of the bay.

"This seems a peaceful village," Drewett said, scooting a chair around to face Barney and sitting with her back to the bay. "But then appearances are often deceptive."

Barney sat, a table between them. "The village is as peaceful as it looks," he said. "Always has been. That's why it's called Saint Peter's Gate—the entrance to heaven." Indeed the promise of peace was the reason Barney had chosen this

place to settle in when he left the navy. After twenty years of regulations and other service life hassles, he just wanted to be left alone.

"A quaint name," the young woman commented, then she got right to business. "The Olongapo City Police have turned the Robbins murder investigation over to the navy," she told Barney. "They're convinced he died as a result of a fight with another sailor."

"Why do they think that?" Barney asked.

"Robbins had quite a lot of money on his person—money that wasn't touched," Drewett explained. "The police believe the money would have been taken if a local was involved, regardless of the actual motive for the killing. Obviously that motive wasn't robbery."

"What about the NPA?" Barney said.

The NPA was the New People's Army—Communist guerrillas active on the island. The NPA had been responsible for several assassinations of American servicemen from Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base.

Drewett shook her head. "It's possible, of course," she said, "but this killing wasn't done NPA style. The guerrillas go for guns and ambushes. And when it's done, they claim the

credit and the publicity. In contrast, Robbins was knifed and died on a deserted beach. It's been three days since the murder, and the NPA hasn't been heard from."

She went on to explain that she had interviewed Robbins' supervisors and shipmates on the aircraft carrier *Java Sea*. *Java Sea* and her battle group were in port for upkeep after a three-month patrol in the Indian Ocean. The ships had been in Subic Bay for a week and would be getting under way in ten days en route to their home ports on the west coast of the United States. "Everyone I talked to on the ship told me Robbins was a good sailor," Drewett said. "Also, he hadn't had any arguments with his shipmates, or to their knowledge with anyone else in the recent past."

"With sailors, it doesn't take long for an argument to start," Barney said. "Especially after they've taken a few beers on board."

Drewett nodded. "True," she said, "but his friends were with him—here in Saint Peter's Gate—until just a short time before he died. The navy, medical examiner placed the time of Robbins' death as Tuesday evening. You reported finding the body the following morning."

"I'm positive the man wasn't

in Barney's Place on Tuesday night," Barney said. "In fact, I hadn't seen him in here at all this trip."

Drewett nodded again. "Robbins' friends told me that he was a regular at the other bar here in the village, Anchor Bar. It seems that he had taken up with one of the prostitutes working there."

"We call them 'Hospitality Girls,'" Barney said.

"In any case," Drewett continued, "on Tuesday evening, Robbins rode a jeepney from Olongapo City to Saint Peter's Gate with several of his buddies from *Java Sea*. They all got off the jeepney in the middle of the village and walked to Anchor Bar. The men were sitting at the bar ordering drinks before they noticed that Robbins hadn't come in with them. They never saw him again." She paused, apparently expecting Barney to comment. He said nothing. "A moment ago, Barney, you said you hadn't seen Robbins in Barney's Place *this trip*. What did you mean?"

"His face was familiar," Barney replied. "I'd seen him before, but not recently. He was probably in here a few months back when *Java Sea* stopped off on her way out to the Indian Ocean." He noticed that as they talked she was studying him. In fact, he realized, her eyes

had not moved from him since the interview began. He had worked with men all his life and was familiar with the technique: watch the eyes; is what he's saying and what you see in his eyes the same? Is he lying? He had been on both sides of this analysis in his time. He knew how to read the truth in men's eyes; he knew how to conceal the truth in his own. She wasn't dealing with an amateur here.

"Tell me how you happened to find the body," she said.

"I go for a walk on the beach around sunrise every morning," he told her. "I found the kid's body about a quarter of a mile south of here. He was stiff—probably been lying out there all night. He'd been stabbed, but I didn't see a knife around anywhere. The police didn't find one later, either. I ran to the church—Father Remedius has the only telephone in the village—and called the police in Olongapo. They came, looked around some, and hauled the body away." He spread his hands. "That's all I know."

"Who else knows about these walks of yours?"

"Just Melinda," Barney said. He indicated the apartment upstairs. "She lives with me here, but she's gone—visiting her relatives on Mindoro. She left a

couple of weeks ago and won't be back for another week and a half."

"That would be Melinda Velasquez, your business partner?"

Barney nodded, wondering how Drewett knew about what was his personal business. Public records maybe? He had used his savings to open Barney's Place, but the property was in Melinda's name because foreigners weren't permitted to own land or a business in the Philippines. "How do you know that?" he asked, keeping his voice casual, unconcerned.

"The NIS has files on former servicemen who run places like this near the base," she said matter of factly. "So, with Miss Velasquez gone, there isn't anyone who can substantiate your story?"

"I didn't know my story needed to be substantiated," he replied, annoyed. Did she suspect he was lying? And why did the NIS have files on local American businessmen like himself?

"I have to verify everything that might be relevant to the case," she told him. "I also need to know where you were Tuesday night—the night Robbins died."

"You'll have to take my word about the walks, at least until Melinda is back," Barney said.

"The local fishermen are already gone by the time I start out, and most everyone else around here works evenings and sleeps in mornings. As to Tuesday night, I was here, working behind the bar. We've been busy because of all the ships in port." Barney's curiosity had to be satisfied. "Why does the NIS have a file on me? I just run a business; I'm not a criminal."

"Politics," she said. "Negotiations with the Philippine government about our bases here are sensitive. The Filipinos are tired of their young women becoming prostitutes for our sailors. They want us out of here, and the navy believes you and your kind are part of the reason. So we keep a close watch. One false move and you're out of the country."

Barney sighed. The flap over base negotiations was nothing new. "The Philippine government just wants to gouge the U.S. on the rent again," he said. "They aren't fools. There are about forty thousand Filipinos working on the Subic Bay Naval Base alone. That's a lot of jobs—a big payroll that wouldn't exist if we pulled out. As far as the prostitution goes, that's just one of the issues. And the fact that it exists isn't my fault. I didn't cause the poverty in this country."

"But you take advantage of it," she snapped back. For a moment, her eyes lost their cool facade, flashing hostility.

"I run an honest business," Barney said, keeping his voice low, his tone patient. He had to work at it. She was building a fire under his volatile temper. He had little patience for self-righteous moral missionaries who, in his opinion, did not understand the local people and their situation. "The girls who work for me are here to talk and to dance with the customers," he explained. "I pay them a small wage, plus they get half the price of a 'Lady's Drink' if the guy they're with is willing to buy in exchange for female company. What the girls and my customers do after they leave here isn't part of my business."

"You can talk your way around what these women do," Drewett said, shifting in her chair, crossing her legs, "but they're still prostitutes."

"They're poor country girls looking for an American to get them out of here," Barney said. "Sure, their romances are accelerated—the guys are only here for a few days at the most. But—"

Drewett held up her hand. "Let's get back to things relevant to the murder," she said.

Barney agreed. He didn't

want to lose his temper with this woman.

"Why is it that the men come all the way out to Saint Peter's Gate?" she asked him. "It must be ten kilometers from the base to here, and there are plenty of bars and nightclubs on Mag-saysay Drive just outside the base in Olongapo City."

"It's more relaxed here," he replied. "And there's no shore patrol to thump them on the head and haul them in if they drink too much and get a little out of line." He was reading her eyes now, and he saw that she was interested in his response to her question. Her eyes were those of a lioness about to pounce on her prey.

"What happens in Saint's Peter's Gate when a sailor gets out of line?" she asked, leaning forward in her chair.

"His buddies usually step in and get him under control," Barney said.

"What if his buddies can't handle him, or they aren't around?"

"I know a little about keeping sailors in line, Miss Drewett," he said. "Remember that I'm an ex-navy chief, and so is Angus MacMurrough, the fellow who runs Anchor Bar."

Drewett wasn't satisfied.

"I want you to elaborate on that statement, Mr. Barney. Explain to me just how you go

about taking care of a sailor who gets out of hand."

Barney sighed. His patience was wearing thin. She's a naval officer, but she doesn't know a thing about handling men, he thought. He wasn't surprised. Barney didn't think women belonged in the navy. They couldn't do a sailor's work. This woman wasn't changing his mind any.

"You have to know how a drunk sailor thinks," he told her. "It's sort of like dealing with a child: you talk to him; persuade him; give him a place where he can sack out for awhile and sleep it off."

"Nothing physical?"

Barney shook his head. "Here at Barney's Place it's never come to that."

"And at Anchor Bar?"

"You'll have to ask Angus MacMurrough."

"I've already talked to him," she said, her expression indicating that she had found the experience distasteful. "I may have to talk to him some more." Her eyes left his for the first time as she glanced at her wristwatch. "I want to interview your employees. Will they be in soon?"

"Any time now," Barney said, relieved. She was apparently through with him, for the present at least.

* * *

Barney backed up closer to the rocks, clear of the beam from the approaching headlights. He was adjusting his mask when he heard the diesel engine throttle down. Then brakes squealed as the jeepney rattled onto the gravel shoulder of the road, rolling into view and stopping a few feet from the rocks and brush behind which Barney and MacMurrough waited.

"What's the trouble, driver?" said a man's voice from the back of the jeepney.

"Now," Barney said. But MacMurrough was already moving, running to the back of the jeepney and thrusting the muzzle of the rifle inside. Barney was there an instant later, switching on his flashlight.

On the fore-and-aft bench seat behind the driver was Chavez Romero. Two alarmed Americans in civilian clothes sat opposite the old Filipino. As planned, Romero had pretended to be asleep when the jeepney stopped in Saint Peter's Gate to pick up the two young men. He had kept his head down, cap pulled low, so the men could not see his face.

"It is late, so I will give you a special low fare to Olongapo," the jeepney driver, Romero's nephew, had told the Americans. "Only one peso each."

The two men had been wary, but were reassured by the presence of the other passenger, a harmless looking old man. They accepted.

Now, Romero sat upright, a scarf pulled across the lower part of his face. He wagged a finger at the Americans. "You punks—get out now," he said.

Everything went exactly as Barney had planned. As the boatman pushed his boat away from the beach, the jeepney, empty now except for the driver, headed back toward the village. Clear of the shallows, the boatman pulled himself aboard and started the old pump engine that powered the craft. Moments later, they were on their way out into the channel, the boat bucking lightly as it cut through the choppy water. The boat's running light, a candle in a bottle lashed to the mast, remained unlit. Seated in the stern of the boat, Barney breathed a sigh of relief. So far, so good. Now, if the storm would just hold off. They needed about two hours. He tried to relax. Tonight's work shouldn't have been necessary, he thought. But Agent Drewett had forced him to act.

Drewett's discussion with Barney was scarcely concluded when Julie and

Treena, Barney's hospitality girls, arrived at the bar for work. Both wore bright colored blouses and tight jeans. Sleek black hair hung to their waists. Dressed as they were, Barney thought they looked like school kids. But that would change. Later, for the night customers, the girls would wear low-cut tops and mini skirts. They wouldn't look so innocent then. Both were pretty and vivacious, but in matters of romance and temperament, they were entirely different. Julie was quick to anger but equally quick to forgive. She fell in and out of love as often as the tide changed, carrying the ships and sailors in and out of port. Conversely, Treena was even-tempered and serious about the few relationships she allowed to develop. For the past several months she had hustled drinks and nothing more. This was a sign, Barney knew, that she was waiting for a favored sailor to return from sea.

Barney introduced the women, explained to his employees why Drewett was there, then returned to the bar to feign work with his ledgers while Drewett set up office on a patio table. Treena was the first to be interviewed. Barney watched through the bead curtains as the young Filipina fidgeted in her chair, wringing



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her hands nervously under the table, nodding or shaking her head in response to the NIS agent's questions. Julie sat on a bar stool at the opposite end of the bar from Barney, filing her fingernails and casting anxious glances toward the patio. They're both nervous as hell, Barney thought. How much do they know?

It occurred to him that he didn't know much about his employees. That wasn't unusual in Saint Peter's Gate. People here didn't ask personal questions and information wasn't usually volunteered. The girls in particular were secretive about their backgrounds. They were afraid word of how they were making a living would get back to their families in the faraway island provinces. Barney didn't pry.

"Good morning, Willis." A plump Filipino man of middle age wearing the brown cassock of a Catholic clergyman stood by the entrance to the bar. He looked back over his shoulder at the navy car parked nearby.

"Good morning yourself, Father Remedius," Barney said, motioning for the priest to come inside.

"I don't wish to intrude if you have business with the navy," said Father Remedius, stepping up to the bar, looking around the room for the driver

of the car. "I wanted only to thank you for your most recent donation." Father Remedius was pastor of Saint Peter's Church and also ran the parish orphanage. Many of the orphans in his care were the abandoned children of American servicemen. The fathers were as often as not unaware of the children's existence; the mothers, struggling and disillusioned, had gone back to the villages from which they came, afraid to take the children with them.

"Glad to help out, Father," Barney said. He regularly contributed bags of rice to help feed the children. When business was good, he added a few hundred pesos to his donation. "As to business," he lowered his voice, "there's an agent from the Naval Investigative Service out back. She's interviewing my people—asking questions about the murder."

No further explanation was needed. Everyone in Saint Peter's Gate knew about the murder, and all were worried about what would happen to them because of it. Should the navy declare the village off limits, hard times would follow.

Father Remedius looked concerned. "Will there be trouble?" he asked.

Barney shrugged. "We'll have to wait and see."

"It is a bad thing, this murder," the priest said, shaking his head, "but one good thing to come of it is that since the unfortunate young man was killed, every soul in the village has been coming to Mass. Well, almost everyone—" He gave Barney a mock reproachful look. "I have never before been so busy with confessions. It seems the people are reminded they are mortal." A troubled look shadowed his face. "Sometimes I learn more about them than I want to know." He mopped the perspiration from his brow. "I wish the rains would come."

The rainy season was long overdue. But the skies remained cloudless; the dry season heat continued to parch the island and its people.

Barney uncapped a dripping bottle of cold Mellow-Mellow soda and handed it to his friend.

"On the house," he said.

At the back of the barroom, Drewett pushed aside the bead curtains allowing Treena to exit and pointing to Julie. The Filipinas swapped places. Treena nodded a greeting to the priest and began filing her nails.

Father Remedius tipped back his head and the bottle, finishing off the Mellow-Mellow in one long swallow. He set the

bottle on the bar and squeezed Barney's arm. "I must be going, my friend," he said. "Peace be with you."

When the priest was gone, Barney sat beside Treena. The girl kept her eyes on her work, deftly shaping a nail with the tiny file. "What sort of questions did Agent Drewett ask you?" he said softly.

"She ask many questions," Treena answered in a small voice, glancing toward the patio. "Questions about you."

"What sort of questions?"

"I ver' worried, Mr. Willis," she said, her dark eyes looking into his. "She want to know if you fight with the customers."

"I see," Barney said. He patted her shoulder and returned to his books. But his mind wasn't on debits and credits.

When Drewett was through with Julie, she had some closing words for Barney before leaving. "I'm not satisfied, Mr. Barney," she said, her cold blue eyes fixed on his. "Someone in this village knows more about this murder than they're telling," she said. "I'm not through with Saint Peter's Gate." She turned then and marched to her car.

As the boat beat its way from the lee of Grande Island, the bay became noticeably

rougher. Long rollers from the open sea lifted the little craft to the top of foaming crests, then sent it racing down the back-sides of the waves into hissing troughs where it was picked up again to rise to the top of the next roller.

Barney was worried. Although they were making progress and were in no particular danger, he wondered if conditions would be too rough for them to make their landfall on the windward side of Grande Island, as planned. He looked forward into the darkness. MacMurrough and Romero were gray shadows hunched and silent in the bow. The Filipino boatman, braced by the midships engine hatch, was managing to keep them more or less on course, swinging the long bamboo tiller handle side to side, ensuring that their bow remained headed into the waves while he gradually edged the boat toward the northwest end of the tiny island becoming visible ahead.

The two prisoners had been stripped naked before the boat got under way and were now vague white forms curled on the deck near Barney's feet. They were securely bound, gagged, and blindfolded. Barney looked down at them. They had to be plenty scared wondering what was going to happen

to them, he thought. Good. He shifted his gaze, searching Grande's black profile. Atop the next wave he saw the landmark he was watching for: huge black tubes, angled upward and pointing out to sea, standing out faintly against the night sky. The big guns had been installed on the island to guard the entrance to Subic Bay during wars of long ago. Now they were rusty, obsolete relics, but still somehow majestic. Below the guns, Barney knew, was a small cove with rock-free access to and from the sea, and a sandy beach on which they could safely land their boat.

He tapped the boatman on the shoulder and pointed the way. The man nodded and began easing the boat toward shore. Barney could hear the ominous crash of waves breaking on invisible rocks ahead. The entrance to the cove was narrow; their landing was going to be dangerous. He crouched beside one of his prisoners, rolled the man over onto his stomach, and began working loose the ropes that bound his wrists. Just in case, he thought. Lips moving silently, he cursed Sandra Drewett. If she had left them alone, none of this would have been necessary. But she had meddled, forcing them into action. When

the crisis had come, Barney had called a meeting of the village leaders.

Several noisy children from the orphanage were playing stick-and-stone baseball on the shoulder of the road near the open front of Anchor Bar.

"Scat, you kids," shouted Angus MacMurrough, the unofficial proprietor of the bar. "We got a important business meeting going on here." MacMurrough, an ex-navy boatswain's mate, was gruff in manner and ugly in every physical way a man can be ugly. But the children knew the old sailor's uncomely way and appearance were a deception of nature behind which was a kindly man. As usual, there would be free bottles of Mellow-Mellow for them at Anchor Bar when they finished playing. They laughed and obediently moved their game farther down the road.

MacMurrough and three other men were perched on stools inside the bar. The serious expressions on their faces attested to the gravity of the matter they had gathered to discuss.

"The last three nights, I've had an undercover NIS agent working my place," Willis Barney told the group. "There's two of them, guys dressed in

civvies like any other sailor on liberty. Apparently they alternate between Barney's Place and Anchor Bar so they don't become too conspicuous. They circulate around amongst the customers asking questions. The sailors spot them for what they are, drink up, leave, and don't come back. No one wants to get involved with the NIS. My business has fallen off to where it's hardly worth opening up and paying my employees."

"Same thing's happening here," said MacMurrough, scratching his armpit.

"Business at my store not so good, too," said Chavez Romero. Romero, portly and bald, was the owner of the village Sari-Sari or convenience store.

"But why does the navy do this?" asked Father Remedius.

"That female NIS agent is behind it," MacMurrough grumbled, rubbing his bulbous nose.

"Boats is right," Barney said. "Agent Drewett thinks someone in the village knows more about the killing here than they're telling."

"What does she want from us?" complained MacMurrough, reaching inside his shirtfront to scratch the tattoo on his chest, a snake coiled beneath a forest of black-gray hair. "I know I told her all I

know. This Robbins kid was at my place every night after *Java Sea* made port, sniffing after one of my girls. He went home with her a couple of nights after closing, and I suppose on back to his ship in the morning. But the night he got it he didn't show up here at all. My girl didn't know where he was and was kinda broke up when she found out the next day he was dead. Seems they were getting serious—least he had led her to think so. She figured she'd found her ticket out of here at last."

"Say, Boats," Barney said, "any chance—"

MacMurrrough held up a thick-fingered hand. "Don't even think it, Willis," he said. "The girl's an angel—wouldn't harm a fly. Anyway, why should she? It's obvious to me the NPA got him."

"We should ice these trouble-maker agents," suggested Romero. He was a fan of the American gangster movies shown at the theater in Olon-gapo City. His limited English vocabulary often reflected his interest.

"We don't need to go quite that far, Chavez," Barney said. "And whatever we do, we'll have to be careful. We don't want to make matters worse. Right now we need to figure out what the four of us can do to get

the NIS off our backs and the sailors coming to Saint Peter's Gate again."

"Agreed," said MacMurrrough. "And soon. These agents are causing the village to miss out on a lot of business that won't be around after *Java Sea* and her escorts get under way."

"What if we just wait, gentlemen," Father Remedius said. "After a while probably the agents will stop coming here."

"No, we cannot wait," Romero said, banging his fist on the bar for emphasis. Bottles and glasses beneath the bar rattled. "We are a small village, and everyone here depends on the sailors. No sailors, no pesos. The sailors, they come to Barney's Place or to Anchor Bar. While they are in the village they buy the souvenirs the people make; they buy the food the people prepare; they hire the boats and boatmen to go swim and fish in the bay. With the pesos from the sailors, the villagers come to my store to buy the things they need; they also put some of their pesos in the gift basket at the church." He shook his head. "No, father, we cannot just wait. We must be rid of these men soon so we can have payoff while the ships are here. I say we must rub them out. It is them or us."

"I have an idea," Barney said. "I was a riverine force

sailor in Vietnam years ago. There was a similar problem—"He stopped talking and studied the priest for a moment. "What I have in mind to do is illegal," he said. "There could be trouble, but if it works, we won't be bothered by NIS agents working undercover out here any more. You might not want to know about this, Father Remedius."

"Pah," the priest said, a touch of anger in his voice. "This problem concerns the people in my parish, so it concerns me as well. I can keep secrets—it is part of my training. I—" He waved his hands at Barney. "Just go on, Willis. Explain."

Barney explained. When he was finished, Anchor Bar reverberated with MacMurrough's donkey-like bray. Romero chuckled and nodded his head enthusiastically. Father Remedius frowned and said nothing.

"The sons-a-bitches," MacMurrough said, still laughing. "When do we do it?"

"Tonight," Barney said.

Barney shivered. He was soaking wet and the wind, stronger and steadier now, definitely had a cold bite. The sea too was running stronger. The storm could not be far

away. The boat's heading was for the leeward side of Grande, moving along smartly, propelled as much by the force and momentum of the following sea as by the puny engine. Grande was a few hundred meters off the starboard beam. In the bow, Romero sat impassive while MacMurrough, beside him on the thwart, removed boon-docker shoes to wring out his sodden socks. The unperturbable boatman stood amidships, feet spread apart in seaman's stance, steadying himself with one hand on the mast while working the tiller with the other hand.

Barney could almost relax now. The operation was nearly done and, thus far, had proceeded according to plan. They had survived the landing on the windward side of Grande, released the prisoners on the island sans clothes and any means of identifying themselves, and successfully confronted the wild surf on their way back out of the cove, getting thoroughly wet in the process. They had been careful not to allow the NIS agents a close look at their abductors. All that remained was to get back across the channel to Saint Peter's Gate before the storm struck, making the bay impassable in a small boat. It was going to be close.

On the island, Barney could see the night lights of the small hotel, the park and athletic field, and the boat landing with blunt-nosed navy landing craft nestled alongside the pilings. The island was otherwise in shadow, asleep it seemed, not a soul stirring anywhere as was fitting for such a late hour.

Suddenly, a white spotlight blinked on from the area of the pier and began panning across the athletic field. Barney saw something white move quickly out of the beam to disappear into the darkness. Across the water came the sound of a starter cranking, then an engine roared to life. Headlights and a revolving red roof light switched on, and the vehicle on which the lights were mounted began moving out onto the athletic field. Shore patrol, Barney thought.

As the shore patrol vehicle bounced across the field, picking up speed, its spotlight probed the shadows. Then the light steadied up, having caught and illuminated in its beam two naked figures who were sprinting frantically across the grass toward a stand of trees.

"Sons-a-bitches," rasped MacMurrrough from the bow. "The shore patrol has caught the bastards bare ass on the baseball field."

Without signal, the boatman eased back the engine throttle. They drifted along silently, parallel to the shore, watching, fascinated, as the event on the island developed.

The naked NIS agents had given up on their flight and stood back to back on the pitcher's mound, captured by the intense lights, hands clasped somewhat futilely over their crotches. The shore patrol vehicle jerked to a stop near third base. Moments later two sailors in whites, with shore patrol brassards on their arms, strode into the light, advancing on the hapless nudes, nightsticks and handcuffs at the ready. One of them was a female petty officer.

Barney heard muffled laughter from ashore. He was delighted. He could not have planned a more satisfactory ending to the NIS agents' evening. He glanced at his fellow conspirators, their faces faintly lit by the glow from the lights on the island. MacMurrrough's eyes were wide, his mouth twisted by an evil grin; on Romero's old face was an ear to ear gap-toothed smile; even the boatman was grinning. Good show, Barney thought. Hah!

The rain began to fall in earnest. Again without signal the boatman eased the throttle forward and nosed the bow of the

boat away from Grande Island, out into the channel. It was a long run back to Saint Peter's Gate, and they would have to hurry.

By daybreak it was evident a tropical storm was coming—a storm just one notch in intensity below a typhoon. A steady rain was falling, driven nearly horizontal at times by wind gusting to gale forces. Olongapo City's radio station had reported the storm would hit Subic Bay about noon. That was before commercial electric power—unreliable at best—had failed. Now, the radio station was silent.

Barney, Julie, and Treena worked side by side buttoning up Barney's Place in preparation for the blow. From the bar's patio Barney could see warships of all shapes and sizes slicing through the wild gray-white bay, passing barely visible Grande Island on their way to the open ocean where they could safely ride out the storm. All around Saint Peter's Gate, Barney knew, the storm-wise villagers were getting ready. Everything outside was being moved inside, including animals varying in size from chickens to water buffaloes; bamboo-thatch window shutters were being swung shut and

secured; plastic water containers were being filled with drinking water drawn by hand from back yard wells; and Chavez Romero's store was no doubt doing a booming business in last-hour purchases. By mid-morning the village would be ready.

Barney and his female crew were snug inside the bar enjoying a late breakfast. Outside, the wind howled and the rain pelted the corrugated-iron roof. Barney didn't hear the car pull up and stop in front. He was just finishing his plate of eggs and rice when Agent Drewett, a wet yellow rain slicker over her khaki uniform, slid back the storm door and stepped inside the bar. Two powerfully built sailors wearing police rigs under their dripping slickers squeezed through the door behind her. The official visit was a little sooner than Barney had expected, but not a surprise. He knew Drewett would suspect who was behind last night's humiliation of her men. He was also sure she wouldn't be able to prove anything. A tight-lipped Drewett marched to the bar where Barney and the two women were seated. Barney saw the anger seething in her telltale eyes. Otherwise, her demeanor was cool and professional. His face was expressionless, but inside

he laughed. Saint Peter's Gate had fought back and successfully struck a blow. The navy policemen moved to a pace behind Drewett and stood looking around the room crammed full of stacked boxes and patio furniture. Their eyes swept in unison across Barney, hesitated a moment taking his measure, then moved on to settle on the two Filipinas.

"Good morning, Agent Drewett and friends," said Barney, cheerfully. "What brings you out this way on such a lousy day?" He had to talk loud to be heard above the noise of the wind and rain outside.

"Apparently you've forgotten that as a member of the fleet reserve you're still subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice," Drewett said to Barney, ignoring the Filipinas, who sat like stones beside him.

"I know that," Barney said evenly.

"Good," she said, slicker pushed back, hands on her hips. "I'm also sure you know why I'm here, but for the record I'll tell you."

"Please do," Barney replied.

"Last night, two NIS agents who had been off duty and on liberty in Saint Peter's Gate were kidnapped from a jeepney while on their way back to the base. They were then taken by native boat to Grande Island

and released minus their clothes and identification. Needless to say, the incident turned into an embarrassment to the NIS as well as to me personally, since these men worked for me."

"A terrible thing," Barney said gravely. "Whoever did it should be caught and punished."

"Indeed they shall be," Drewett continued. "You see, the kidnappers were careful to avoid being identified—my men were blindfolded almost the moment they got off the jeepney. Being professionals, however, they are trained observers and glimpsed a couple of important things before the blindfolds went on."

Barney's eyebrows raised in question. A tiny alarm went off inside his head. "That so?" he said.

Drewett was enjoying herself now. She leaned on the bar, her face close to Barney's. Her eyes, he observed, were those of a happy executioner, slipping the noose around her victim's neck. "My agents noticed that two of the men were bigger than most Filipinos," she said. "In fact, they were too big to be Filipinos at all. Also, one of these men—his shirt happened to be partly unbuttoned—had a snake tattooed on his chest—his hairy chest."

As Barney watched, her eyes changed to those of a blue-eyed viper, ready to strike.

"Do you know anyone with such a tattoo on his hairy chest, Mr. Barney?"

What could he say? He didn't say anything.

Drewett backed away and stood in front of Barney with arms folded across her breasts, eyes alight with triumph. "That man was obviously Angus MacMurrough," she said. "But I don't believe for a moment that a crude animal like MacMurrough has the brains to plan and pull off such a stunt. I expect to prove that you were involved, too, Mr. Barney. Perhaps you did it to avoid the investigation of another crime even more serious."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, shaken but doing his best not to let it show on his face.

At that moment, the storm door slid back once again to admit a rain-wet boy. All eyes in the room turned to the child. The boy paused by the door, his eyes searching the strange faces.

He saw Barney. "Mr. Willis," he said, his small voice excited, frantic. "Father Remedius need you. The orphanage—"

They ran through the rain to

the heart of the village where the bell tower and cross of Saint Peter's Church stood slightly above and amidst thrashing fronds and wind-bent palm trees. The parish orphanage was a long, low building beside the church. Barney ran ahead of the group. Approaching the church, he saw immediately what the crisis was. Several of the heavy corrugated iron panels on the orphanage roof had been torn free of their mountings by the violent wind, exposing the interior of the building to the rain. Wind pressure from underneath was causing the remaining roof panels to work loose. The entire roof was in danger of blowing off the building. Several children, wet, sopping bed mats and blankets in their arms, ran for the shelter of the church. Father Remedius emerged from the orphanage door carrying two of the littlest children, one under each arm. Barney saw other villagers running toward the church; Angus MacMurrough was on his way from Anchor Bar. There was no time to waste—Barney took charge. He dispatched Julie to Chavez Romero's store for tools, nails, and line; Treena he sent to the church to assist Father Remedius with the distraught children. To himself, MacMurrough, and other vil-

lage men who stood waiting for instructions fell the task of saving the roof. They would have to work fast. When the full strength of the storm swept over the village, it would be too late.

"What can we do to help?" shouted Sandra Drewett to Barney. She and the two navy policemen stood huddled in their slickers beside the road, watching.

Barney had forgotten all about them. "You could help with the children," he told her, pointing to the church. "And your men can help Boats and me with the roof. We're going to need some strong backs."

"Done," she said.

Barney was back to his unfinished book work, ledgers spread out before him on the bar, when the navy staff car pulled off the blacktop and stopped in front of Barney's Place. Agent Drewett, in civilian slacks and blouse, got out of the car and marched purposefully toward the entrance to the tavern. Barney watched her over the top of his reading glasses. What the hell does she want now? he thought.

Drewett paused in the shade by the entrance. "Got a couple of minutes, Mr. Barney?" she asked. "I want to apologize."

Apologize? "Come in," he said, curious.

She climbed onto a bar stool across from him. He studied her eyes as he had learned to do, looking for a clue. The ice was gone; in its place was a warmth he hadn't seen before. What did she want to apologize for, he wondered. He didn't like her, but she had been doing her job as she saw it. He respected that.

The last time Barney had seen Drewett was the day of the storm. While he and the other men had fixed the orphanage roof, she had helped Father Remedius and Treena with the children. Barney didn't know what had happened inside the church that day, but while the priest and the two women worked, Treena had confessed to the killing of Raymond Robbins. Father Remedius told Barney about it later, after Treena had gone away with Drewett in the staff car. The priest had known all along. The girl had told him in the confessional, seeking absolution and counsel. She hadn't meant for it to happen, Father Remedius had explained. Robbins had courted Treena when *Java Sea* was in port in Subic Bay several months earlier, before the carrier went to the Indian Ocean.

The sailor had promised mar-

riage; Treena had waited faithfully for his return. But when *Java Sea* returned to Subic Bay, Robbins had shunned Barney's Place and Treena, going instead to Anchor Bar where he began his sham all over again with another girl. Secrets didn't remain so for long in a village as small as Saint Peter's Gate. Treena knew her sailor was back, and she soon learned what he was doing. She was hurt; she was angry; most of all, she didn't understand. One evening she had waited, out of sight beside a nipa hut by the jeepney stop in the middle of the village. When Robbins got off the jeepney, she stepped out from beside the hut and motioned to him. It was getting dark. Robbins saw her, but no one else noticed. The two went for a walk on the beach. All Treena wanted was an explanation. The sailor didn't have one—just lies. She had cried. Almost unbelievably under the circumstances, the man had tried to force himself upon her. He had pushed her down on the sand; torn her clothes. Treena, like all of the hospital-ity girls, carried a switchblade for protection. She had protected herself.

Father Reemdius could not divulge what was told to him in the confessional. He had advised the girl: "You only de-

fended yourself. What you did was not a deliberate crime." But Treena was afraid and steadfastly refused to reveal the truth of the killing at Saint Peter's Gate. Unaccountably, in the church that stormy day, Treena had told Drewett what she had done.

"I want to apologize to you, Mr. Barney," Drewett said. "Before the—uh—mysterious kidnapping of my undercover agents—" there was a touch of humor in her eyes "—I was using tactics on you and the others in Saint Peter's Gate that I'm not proud of. The two agents were part of those tactics."

Barney shrugged. "You were doing your job," he said. "You don't need to apologize to me for that."

"The apology is for the way I went about putting pressure on you and the others," she explained. "And for my attitude. You see, I knew I wasn't going to get any cooperation from the villagers. Before I came to see you, I talked to everyone in this village who might have seen something that could help me with the murder investigation. They wouldn't tell me anything. I'm sure that was because I'm an outsider. So what I did was plant the notion with the villagers, especially your employees, that I believed ei-

ther you or Angus MacMurrough killed Robbins. The fact is, I never suspected either of you. I planned for you and MacMurrough to protect your own hides by doing what I couldn't do—asking the questions and getting the answers I couldn't get; digging out the clues I couldn't find on my own. The locals would talk to you though they wouldn't talk to me." She laughed. "What you and MacMurrough *actually* did wasn't according to my plan—and was totally unexpected."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Barney said, straight-faced. He still didn't trust her.

"Of course not," she said, smiling. "Nevertheless, my tactics worked, but not the way I expected. That's where the apology for my attitude comes in."

Barney looked puzzled.

"When I interviewed you, Mr. Barney," Drewett explained, "I expect you got the impression that I personally hold people like yourself and MacMurrough in low regard. That was no put-on. At the time, I considered the two of you to be scoundrels of the worst sort: dealing in vice; taking advantage of these Filipinos for your own gain. I've changed my mind since. I see now that in your own quiet

ways, both you and old MacMurrough are actually pretty outstanding ambassadors for America."

"That's laying it on a little thick," Barney said.

"No, it isn't," she said. "Do you know why Treena finally told about the killing? She confessed because she thought you and Angus MacMurrough were about to be arrested. She couldn't let that happen. You see, she and the other people of this village think a lot of you two men."

"What will happen to Treena?" Barney asked.

"The killing was an act of self-defense," Drewett replied. "It's men like Robbins who give Americans a bad reputation in the Philippines. I won't go so far as to say he got what he deserved, but he certainly did ask for it. Treena's in the custody of the Olongapo City police. I suspect that the Philippine authorities won't consider what she did to be a crime. They'll hold her for a few days to keep the navy happy, then quietly send her back to her province." Sandra Drewett put her hand on Barney's arm. "That's the story," she said. "Now, will you buy a lady a drink?"

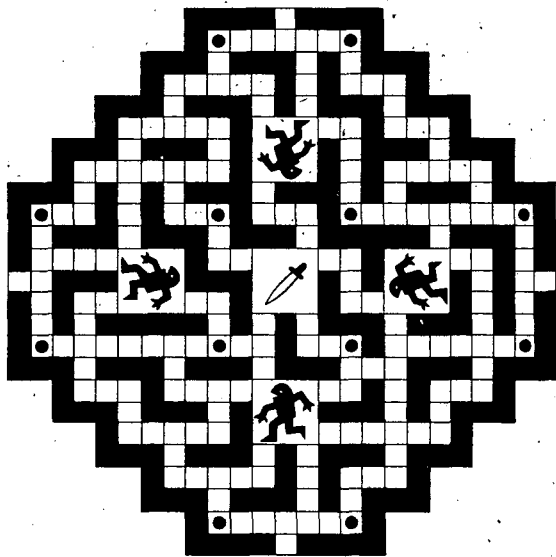
Barney saw the twinkle in her eyes and smiled. "On the house," he said.

UNSOLVED

by
Dave Phillips

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the November issue.



OBJECTIVES: Enter maze. Destroy all monsters and collect all dots. Exit.

RESTRICTIONS: You may not destroy the monsters until you first collect the sword.

You may not pass through a grid space more than once.

See page 148 for the solution to the September puzzle.

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FICTION

Spring Bloom

by Thomasina Weber

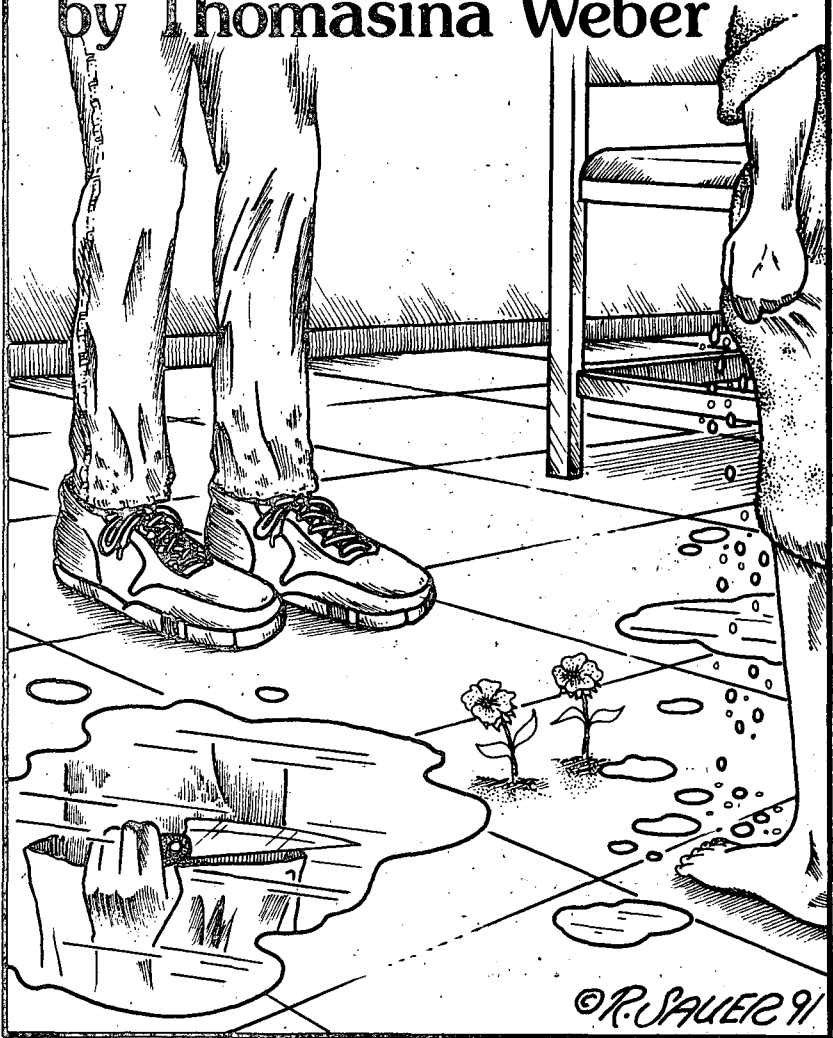


Illustration by Richard Sauer

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LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
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He never should have become a teacher. He should have become a brick mason, but he didn't have the muscles for that. A hairdresser, then, only he'd never be able to stand those gossiping women. Teaching—why hadn't he considered kindergarten? Why high school, and ninth-graders, of all things? They were just at the age when they delighted in making a teacher's life miserable.

Dan sighed and got to his feet. The grass was still wet and would surely stain the knees of his slacks. He should learn not to be so impulsive. It was Saturday morning, and he had planned to spend a few hours at the library, had even dressed for it, in fact, but he was still upset about last night, and that was why he had gone into his garden. He could have planted the bulbs any time; it didn't have to be this morning.

Dan de Lyon. He would never forgive his parents for that. Not Daniel, but Dan. His students insisted on calling him Mr. Lyon, but he knew they referred to him as Dandy.

Billy Bonan was the worst. He was the ringleader. Dan supposed he should be thankful that they were only mischievous and not violent, but Billy made it impossible for him to be thankful for anything.

Billy and his cohorts had taken up their positions outside his house last night shortly before dark, no doubt to ensure that Dan would see them. They had draped themselves on his picket fence and proceeded to discuss him in loud voices.

When darkness fell, they entered his yard. Dan reminded himself that they were only kids and that they were not violent, despite the fact that they were all bigger than he. Dan had been sickly all his life, and although he was in good health now, his body remained small and frail, and he looked much older than his forty-two years.

He jumped as a knock came at his door. "Mr. Lyon, can we come in?" It was Billy's voice, and behind it, Dan could hear the snickers of the other two boys.

It would be useless to pretend he wasn't here; since he never drew his blinds, he knew they could see every move he made. "Sorry, Billy, I'm too busy to see anyone," he called, despising the quaver in his voice.

"Hey, didja hear that?" said Billy. "Dandy Lyon's too busy for company." With a sinking feeling, Dan remembered that his doors were not locked.

"You don't look busy to us, Mr. Lyon," said Billy. "We'll come in and keep you company."

Billy was the most formidable looking of the trio. Nearly six feet tall and burly, he sported a severe case of acne. Perry Wilson, redheaded and freckled, was skinny and wore a perpetual grin. Howard Gray had thick glasses and seemed never to know what to do with his hands.

"I'm getting ready to go out," said Dan.

"In your bathrobe?"

"I was about to take a shower."

"Well, hey, we're just in time to help you," said Billy. "Come on, guys, let's give Mr. Lyon a hand."

Dan turned to run, but Billy caught his arm and spun him round. "Take his arms, boys. We don't want Dandy to get lost on the way to the bathroom."

Dan tried to break free, but Perry and Howard only tightened their grip. "This is an outrage," Dan said. "I'll have you all expelled for this."

"Shiver, shiver," said Billy. "Hey, guys, don't that scare hell out of you?" Perry giggled, and Howard said, "Yeah."

"Into the tub with him." Perry and Howard lifted him effortlessly; and Billy turned on the shower.

"You didn't take his clothes off," said Howard.

"We don't want him to get pneumonia from this cold wa-

ter, do we?" said Billy, and Perry giggled.

Dan's teeth chattered, but his rage kept him from feeling the cold. The boys were no longer holding him, but every time he tried to step out of the bathtub, they pushed him back. How could he ever have believed they were not violent?

"Why are you doing this?" he gasped.

"I thought you'd never ask, Mr. Lyon." Billy lounged against the wash basin. "Remember the test you gave us the other day?"

"Of course I remember. You failed it."

"You made it hard so that I would fail it."

"You failed it because you don't pay attention in class or do your homework."

"Gee, Mr. Lyon, the way you've been grading me, I might have to repeat ninth grade, and you'll have to put up with me for another whole year."

"Over my dead body."

"Hey, there's an idea."

Dan made another effort to leave the bathtub, but Billy stepped forward. "You stay put, Mr. Dandy Lyon."

"Just how long—"

"Until you learn what it means to fail Billy Bonan," said Billy. "Now, if you think that cold water's uncomfortable,

wait till I turn on the hot."

"What do you want, Billy?"

"I want to talk."

"I won't talk until you let me out of here."

Billy shrugged. "Okay. I'm getting bored anyway." He shut off the water. "Throw him a towel, Perry."

"I have to change my clothes," said Dan.

"Don't push your luck. A towel's good enough."

They escorted him into the kitchen and all seated themselves around the table. Dan would have given a year's pay for a cup of hot coffee. "Do you do this to a teacher every time you fail a test?" he asked.

"No, but this time was special. My old man said if I failed one more test he was going to whip me, and yours was it."

"Your father beat you because you failed a test?"

"You heard me."

"That's inexcusable. But it isn't my fault that you failed."

"You could have made it easier."

Dan sighed. "Why don't you get out of here? You've got your revenge. That's what you wanted, isn't it? To humiliate me?"

"Oh, we're not finished with you yet, Mr. Dandy Lyon. Howard, see if you can find a knife in one of those drawers. A good sharp knife."

Howard turned pale. "Hey, man, what are you gonna do?"

"You'll see. Now get that knife."

"No way. If you're going to kill him, you can do it yourself." Perry let out a squeak at Howard's words, and both boys dashed for the door.

"You two get back here!" But they were gone. Billy turned to Dan. "Well, looks like it's just you and me, Dandy."

Dan liked those odds a lot better, even though he knew he was no match for Billy Bonan. Dan stood up, shivering constantly now as the water drained off his clothes and puddled on the floor. Billy searched the drawers for a knife but never turned his back on Dan.

Dan circled the table. If only he could find a weapon of some kind. His kitchen held the bare necessities, and for the first time in his life he regretted not being a collector. A heavy bowl, or a full flowerpot—anything would suffice, but there was nothing.

Billy had the knife in his hand now, a sharp carving knife that made icy sweat pop out on Dan's forehead.

"Billy, you're not thinking. All because of a test, you're going to throw your life away by killing me?" Dan continued to circle the room, keeping the table between them.

"Who said I'm going to kill you? But now that you've suggested it—"

Dan began to get an idea. His gaze locked on Billy's eyes, he put his hands behind his back and started to squeeze the water out of the front hem of his robe.

"What's the matter, Dandy, getting tired?" asked Billy. He waved the knife.

"Not at all," said Dan. He took a deep breath and darted sideways.

As Dan hoped he would, Billy thought he was trying for the living room and spurted in the opposite direction to head him off.

When Billy hit the puddle, his feet went out from under him, and he fell heavily.

Dan was not prepared for the shout of pain followed by the

sudden silence. He stepped cautiously forward. Neither was he prepared for the blood.

Dan brushed at the stains on the knees of his good slacks. He had to wash the dirt off his hands anyway, so he might as well go back inside and change his pants.

He felt good. In fact, he had never felt better in his life. He was free now, free of Billy at last. He could afford to feel sorry for the boy. He might even, on the way to the library, stop at the hospital to see him.

He smiled at himself in the mirror as he prepared to leave. No, it hadn't been necessary to plant the bulbs this morning, but when they bloomed, they would make a beautiful grave marker for his teacher's certificate.

(continued from page 4)

make a couple of suggestions. One is that the books from which the puzzles are taken may be findable at your library. The other is to make certain that your own solution is air-

tight—that it covers all the information given, contradicts nothing that is given, and is the only potential solution that does so. That usually takes care of it.

Usually.

FICTION

Inside Straight

by David Gates

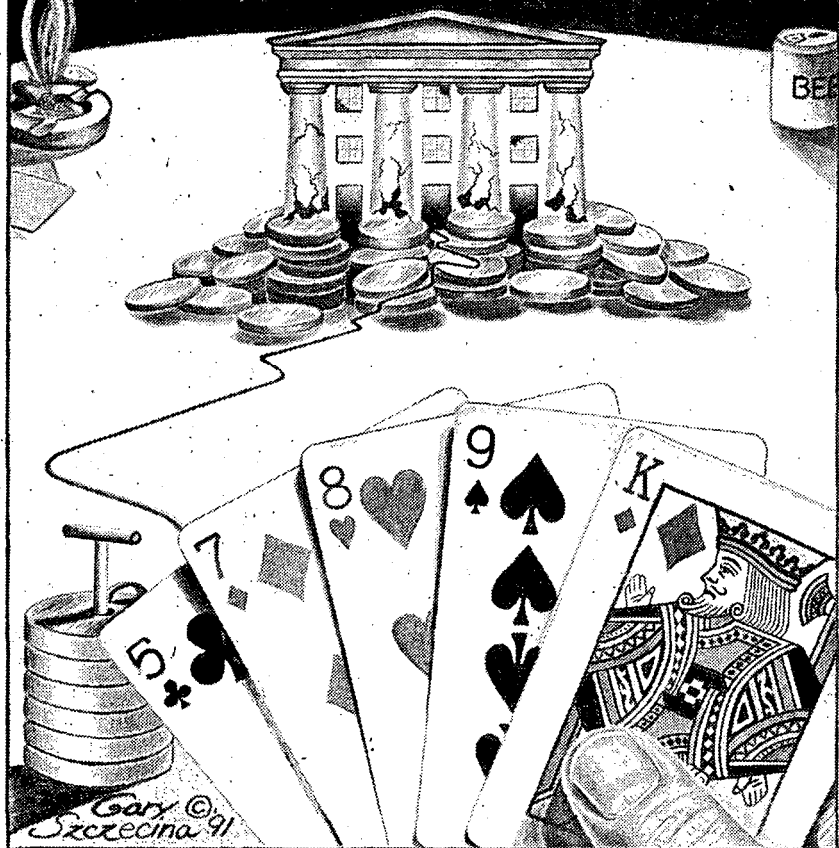


Illustration by Gary Szczecina

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Monday nights I had a regular card game. It was the usual mixed bag of guys—an attorney, a bartender, a broker, a contractor, an architect, a cop, and me. We played quarter, half, with a three-raise limit, so the pots didn't go much over twenty bucks as a rule and it was hard to drop more than a hundred if you didn't chase too many bets. The past couple of weeks I'd been on a roll, and I started out that night flush with confidence. I lost my shirt, of course.

"Well, Jack," Ernie Bacon said to me when the game broke up a little after midnight, "like the fella says, some days you get the bear, and some days the bear gets you." Ernie was the builder. "Which reminds me," he went on, shrugging himself into his jacket, "there was something I wanted to ask you about."

"Shoot," I said.

"Walk me to the car," he suggested.

We left together. I lived only six blocks away, and I'd walked over. Ernie had come in from Winchester, maybe half an hour's drive.

"Problem?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. You remember my younger daughter, Betsy?"

"Vaguely," I said. "She's the

one who got married, year before last?"

"Yeah, guy named Chuck Valentine, works for Digital out in Maynard. Computers. Nice enough kid, I can't complain. She could've done worse." He glanced over at me. "As a matter of fact, she could've done a lot worse."

"Seems to me I remember your saying she was a little wild," I remarked.

"She got in with a bad crowd for a while there," he admitted. "Dropped out of high school her senior year, did some drugs, got arrested a couple of times for shoplifting. Don't get me wrong, though," he said. "She's a good girl, basically. I'm just thankful she didn't get herself knocked up or strung out on coke or something."

"You figure she's gotten it out of her system?"

"Oh, yeah. She's settled down now. Husband, split-level ranch in Sudbury, probably a baby on the way sooner or later. I'm not too worried about her."

"What are you worried about?"

"She had a boyfriend a few years back. Real bad apple, Slo-cum, his name was. Jimmy Slo-cum. Had a juvenile record, vandalism, breaking and entering, boosting tape decks out of cars. I threw him out of the

house more than once. Finally I told Betsy I didn't want him coming around any more, but that didn't help. She'd just sneak out, meet up with him at the Dairy Queen or the bowling alley. It was making me crazy. But then one day the law caught up with him, popped him with a trunkful of burglary tools." He sighed. "Trouble is, Betsy was in the car with him."

"What happened?" I asked him.

Ernie shrugged. "I put the fix in," he said. "It cost, sure, but what else was I supposed to do?"

"What about the boyfriend?"

"That was part of the deal," Ernie said. "I traded him off. Betsy got six months' probation, he got three to five at Walpole."

"And that's the part you're not so proud of," I said. I didn't make it a question.

"Like I say, I'd do it again."

"Okay," I said. "What's the punchline?"

"Slocum's getting out of jail sometime this week. Maybe he's already out."

"You think he holds a grudge?"

"I would, if it were me," Ernie said. "See, it was a frame. Betsy wasn't in on it, of course, but what I did, I talked to a couple of guys, guys I figured probably knew some other guys

they could talk to, and they did. That's how the kid got set up."

"Those kinds of favors don't come cheap," I remarked.

"Well, let's just say that nowadays, when I have to pour concrete, I don't put it out to bid," he told me. "I make one phone call, I tell them where the job is, how many yards in the pour, and it's taken care of. Keeps it simple."

"You'll be doing business with those guys for the rest of your life, Ernie," I pointed out. "Once you start, you're in the heavy for keeps."

"Yeah, I know," he said. "You don't have to remind me."

"What is it you want from me?" I asked him.

"I need somebody to watch my back, just in case," he said. "Somebody I can trust. You're a private dick, you've got a carry permit for a gun, and we've known each other, off and on, for six or eight years. Besides," he added, with a quick grin, "I've seen the way you play cards."

"I don't know, Ernie," I said. "Why don't you call your friends with the cement mixers? They'd probably be happy to help you out."

He shook his head. "Look, Jack," he said, "just because I'm already eating out of the same dish with those guys, it doesn't mean I want to get in

bed with them, too."

"I see your point," I said. "Where do you want me to start?"

"I got a job up in Saugus," he said. "We're taking a building down across from the old iron works. Why don't you come out to the site tomorrow, say around lunchtime? I'll show you my schedule, introduce you around." He scuffed his foot back and forth on the pavement, a little embarrassed. "I know I may be making a mountain out of a molehill over this, Jack, but I want some kind of edge. I can't be looking over my shoulder all the time, wondering if Slocum's coming after me with a tire iron."

"All right," I told him. "I'll be there."

The next day I went out over the bridge and took Route 1 up through Revere. It was about ten thirty, and one of those bright fall mornings, a little blustery but clear all the way to the horizon, with the sky that Wedgwood blue you get north of Boston in early October. I had some time to kill, so I skipped the first two Saugus exits and got off at Walnut Street, at the town line, and dawdled back down through the Lynn Woods with the windows rolled down and Stevie

Winwood on the tape deck. I was feeling pretty good about myself until I got a couple of blocks from the demolition site, about noon, and ran into the police barricades and the patrol cars. A state trooper was waving traffic by, but I parked my car, got out, and walked over.

"You can't leave your vehicle there, sir," the trooper told me.

"Can I get through, then?" I asked him.

"Only emergency vehicles, sir," he said.

"What's up?" I got out my I.D. and showed him my license. "I've got an appointment with Ernie Bacon; he's the general contractor on that job up the road."

"Well, if he is, he's got his hands full," the trooper said. "They were supposed to blow the place sometime this afternoon, but somebody screwed up. It's a good thing we had the area cordoned off already, and fire trucks in position."

"What do you mean?"

"The building blew up ahead of schedule is what I mean, and some of the guys rigging the charges were still inside. They're digging through the rubble now, looking for survivors, but it's a real mess. Any business you've got with the GC, it'll have to wait."

I flipped through my wallet and came up with a badge for

the Middlesex County D.A.'s office. It was about three years out of date, but I'd never turned it in. "How about this?" I asked him.

He looked at it and snorted. "You guys," he said. He looked at my I.D. a second time. "Tribault," he said, thoughtfully. "You any relation to the hockey player?"

"He's my brother," I told him.

"You guys," he said again, grinning. "You got all the angles." He jerked his thumb past his shoulder and turned away from me.

I ducked under the yellow tape and made my way up the block. There was a lot of noise ahead, just out of sight, but for some reason there was an eerie quiet in the area immediately around me, and nobody was on the street. A haze of fine dust sifted down through the air, making the sunlight cloudy and diffuse, and an acrid odor penetrated my sinuses. It felt like I was inhaling sand. My mouth tasted gritty and my eyes smarted. I turned the corner, and walked smack dab into bedlam.

It was like the scene at some horrendous natural disaster. There were hundreds of people milling around, cops, firemen, EMT's, television crews, rescue workers, hardhats, civil defense personnel, news photog-

raphers, uniformed security guards, ambulance drivers, a couple of guys selling coffee and sandwiches out of the back of a truck, and half a dozen frantic officials scattered through the crowd with walkie-talkies in one hand and bullhorns in the other, trying to restore some semblance of order, with everybody shouting contradictory instructions at one another and charging off in different directions. I spotted a small group of what looked like senior construction workers huddled off to one side, conferring in the shelter of a couple of trailers with BACON CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING lettered on the sides in blue. I picked my way across the litter of debris, pressure hoses and electrical cable, puddles of water and bits of masonry, and made it to the trailers without anybody challenging me.

"Christ-a-mighty, Bud," one of them was saying, "the big crane's still up in Peabody at the North Shore Shopping Center. We'd be lucky if we got it here by morning."

"Do the best you can, then," the guy called Bud told him. "Meanwhile, we'll use the half-track with the seventy-five footer." He turned to somebody else. "Charlie, I heard there's a Biddle, Peretti crew working a job over to the beach in Revere.

Find out if we can borrow a second backhoe off of them, and ask them about a frontloader, too. We're losing ground here." Then he noticed me. "Can I help you?" he asked wearily. Deep creases marked his face, and dust mixed with sweat caked the skin. Fatigue made dark smudges under his eyes. I put him at about fifty.

"I'm looking for Ernie Bacon," I said.

"Hell, isn't everybody?" he demanded, waving an arm toward the pile of collapsed steel and concrete. Bulldozers and other heavy equipment crawled and creaked over the wreckage. The stink of diesel fumes added to the miasma. "What did you want to see Ernie about?" he asked me. "Not that it matters much," he added, glancing away from me.

"It's a personal matter," I explained. "He told me he needed my help."

"Well, it's a little late for that now," Bud remarked. He massaged the lower part of his face with his hands. Grime smeared onto his palms and he rubbed them off on his pants. "Jesus," he muttered, looking at his hands. "My wife'll kill me."

"Didn't Ernie show up this morning?" I asked him.

"Show up?" Bud blinked at me. "Sure he showed up, for Christ's sake. He was here first

thing. Ernie never shirked a job in his life. That's what he was doing inside."

"Inside?" I repeated stupidly.

"He was in the basement with the explosives crew, you dumb bastard," Bud shouted at me furiously. "That's when the whole goddamn building caved in on them."

I went and had a pastrami sandwich and a beer at a place on the Lynnway. Boston was losing to the Blue Jays in the playoffs on TV. I had a couple more beers, just to keep my strength up, and then I decided to start looking for Jimmy Slocum. It wasn't much, but it was all I had.

I got some change from the bartender and made a couple of phone calls. The first was to Phil Magruder, the cop I played poker with. He was a detective third, downtown.

"Hey, Jack, what's up?" he asked when I got him on the line.

"I've got some bad news, and I've got a favor to ask, Philly," I told him.

"Which one's the bad news?" he asked, chuckling.

"Ernie Bacon's had an accident," I said. "Most probably fatal."

"What happened?"

"A building collapsed on him."

"Jesus, that's a hell of a thing, Jack."

"You're telling me," I said.

"Wait a minute," he said. I heard him cover the mouthpiece for a second with his hand. "Is that this business out in Saugus?" he asked me when he came back on. "It was just on the news."

"That's the one."

"You have something going on that, Jack?" he asked. His tone of voice was a little too casual.

"I might," I said. "Ernie and I got to talking last night, after the card game. He wanted to hire me."

"Hire you for what?"

"Sort of a bodyguard."

There was a pause. "I'll tell you what, Jack," Phil said after a space, "why don't you give me what you've got, and we'll see where we take it from there."

"That's the point," I said. "I don't have much of anything."

"Don't play hide the salami on me, Jack. What did Ernie tell you last night?"

"He said he was worried. He's been doing business with the mob, Philly, the last four or five years. I don't know what the deal is, but he was concerned enough to want someone covering his tail."

"And that's it?"

"That's all she wrote."

He sighed. "It's not much,"

he said. "And it ain't exactly news."

"That's what I told you."

"Okay, what's the other thing?"

"What other thing?"

"You said you wanted a favor."

"Oh, yeah," I said. "I need a trace on an ex-con, kid name of Jimmy Slocum. He has a release date from Walpole, some time this week or last."

"Kind of locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen, aren't you, Jack?"

"I'd appreciate it if you could get the release date for me, Philly, maybe the name of his parole officer, last known address, the usual thing."

"I'll see what I can do. Meantime, if you come up with anything else on Ernie, you let me know."

"I'll keep you posted," I said, and hung up.

I took a deep breath, and called Information for a number on Betsy Valentine, Ernie Bacon's married daughter out in Sudbury. She answered on the third ring.

"Chuck?"

"Mrs. Valentine? My name's Jack Tribault. I'm a friend of your dad's."

"Yes?"

"Um," I said. "Betsy, listen. I guess nobody's called you yet. There's been a problem, an ac-

cident, at one of your father's jobs."

"What kind of problem?"

"A serious one," I told her. "Ernie was taking down a building out in Saugus—"

"Oh, my God," she said. "I saw something about that on the TV. What's happened?"

"There isn't any easy way to tell you this, Betsy. He was inside the building when it came down. They're searching for him now."

There was a long silence.

"Betsy?" I asked.

I heard her take a deep, shuddering breath. "Oh, thank you, God," she said. Her voice sounded hollow and distant, as if she were holding the receiver away from her body. "Oh, thank you, thank you. It's all over now. It's all over." She gave a sort of choked laugh, halfway between a giggle and a sob, and then she hung up on me.

“**T**ricky area,” Marge Jacoby said. “That’s a very tricky area to get into, Jack, childhood sexual abuse.” Marjorie was a psychiatric social worker. We were having drinks together in a bar near Copley Square. “Fraught with ambiguities.”

“Fraught,” I said.

“Lot of denial, there.”

“Comes with the territory,” I said.

“Yeah, but you’re not interested in the ambiguities,” she said. “You want a straight yes or no answer. Could some daughter be desperate enough to try to kill her father?”

“Or have it done.”

“Well, she might have wished him dead, or wished herself dead, for that matter, but there’s a terrific amount of repression involved. Yes, we have workshops, and the problem’s a lot more out in the open than it was, and people are more willing to seek counseling, but it’s still a tough one. Even adult survivors of incest can take a long time to accept the problem, or even that they *have* a problem.”

“I know what you mean,” I said. “It’s hard for me to reconcile that with the image I have of this guy.”

“Or the image he had of himself, Jack. You have to remember that, too.”

“I’m trying,” I said.

“Maybe that’s the best we can hope for,” Marge said, smiling at me over the rim of her glass. “Anyway, this is just a shot in the dark, right? You’re guessing.”

“Grasping at straws is more like it,” I said. “What about the wife? What would her part be in all this?”

"There's plenty of denial there, too," she said. "How can you be a wife to your husband, and a mother to your children, and admit that this kind of thing is going on under your own roof and you're essentially a party to it?"

"No news is good news, in other words."

"Something like that," Marge said. "Do you think you're on the right track?"

"Well, in this case the problem is method, not motive. I just don't know how to put it together."

"That's your department, Jack, figuring it all out. Me, I'm just looking for some signs along the road." She drank off her gimlet. "Speaking of which, how about another one to point me in the proper direction?"

I turned around to signal the waitress for another round of the same and caught sight of Phil Magruder. I waved him over to our table.

"How now, brown cow?" he said to me. "Hiya, Marjorie. You slumming?"

"Between the two of you, I figure I get the pick of the litter," she said.

"Just my luck," Phil said, squeezing in next to her. "I always admired a woman who took in stray puppies."

"How's the wife, Philly?" I inquired.

"Fine and dandy," he said. "Home with the kids, I hope, unless she left a dirty message on your answering machine."

"Be still, my beating heart," Marge said. "You're like two dogs circling a fire hydrant. Maybe I should have worn a raincoat."

"Don't take it seriously," Phil said. He turned to me. "What's the word, Jack?"

"I was just wondering how to blow up a building ahead of schedule," I said. "Radio transmitter, maybe? The way you see those signs along the highway: 'Turn Off Shortwave, Blasting in Progress.'"

"Can't be done," Phil said. "The explosives are hardwired, not remote. The detonators all work off a central board, back in the control shack. They aren't hooked up to the current until you're ready to test."

"But wasn't that what Ernie was doing inside the building, checking the circuits with his demolition team?"

"Good guess," Phil said, thinking it over. "Still, it would take some kind of electronics genius to figure out how to set the charges off before you were clear."

"What are the chances of sabotage?"

He shrugged. "I've talked to some guys up there, but they're playing it close to the vest. Ap-

parently, there's a possibility the circuits could have been open, but nobody's pointing the finger at anybody, not yet. There's a strong possibility it was an inside job, though, if it wasn't an accident. They want to bring in the state police arson squad, and maybe even the Feds, but what with the backlog of cases, that could take months."

"Things are looking up then," I said.

"Yeah, if the local cops get a break," Phil said. "How about it, you have anything new?"

"Nothing to write home about," I told him, sliding off the banquette and standing up. "You'll be the first to know if I do."

"Oh, hey," he said. "I got an address for you on the Slocum kid." He handed me a slip of paper. "It's his mother's place, but there's no guarantee he'll be there. He's done his whole sentence, so he's not on probation."

"Thanks, Philly," I said.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "I'll see you next Monday."

"I hope to be talking to you before then," I told him.

"So do I," he said.

I was unlocking the door to the vestibule of my apartment building when the big guy materialized behind me, at the

foot of my stoop. "Let's not do anything silly," he said.

I turned around slowly, keeping both hands in sight.

He shook his head. "Let's not overdo it, either," he advised me, smiling. He had his own hands in his pockets and his topcoat buttoned.

"Okay," I said. "Let's not."

"A word to the wise, that's all," he said.

"I'm all ears," I told him.

"What happened to Ernie Bacon, it was too bad," he said.

"It could happen to anybody in that line of work."

"That's right," the big guy said. "It could happen to anybody. You ought to be careful, poking around."

"I'll stay out of old buildings," I said.

"You do that," he said. "Keep your nose out of where it doesn't belong. Certain folks would just as soon you didn't muddy the waters, if you take my meaning."

I nodded. "I get the message," I said.

"If I were you," he said with a quick shrug, "I'd stick to snapping nasty pictures and bugging motel rooms. That way you won't wind up taking a moonlight swim with cement waterwings." He smiled at me one more time and sauntered off down the street, whistling to himself. The tune was familiar.

It sounded like "Santa Lucia."

The address Phil Ma-gruder had given me the night before was in Arlington-Heights, over near the junior high school, in a hilly neighborhood that was mostly pre-war triple-deckers. I parked up the street and walked back down to the house. It was just past nine o'clock in the morning.

The bottom buzzer said SLOCUM, and I pushed it.

The guy who came to the door was in his early twenties, pale and unshaven but stocky and in good physical shape. I figured it had to be Jimmy. Maybe he'd lifted weights in jail. He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans, and he had a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth. He pushed the storm door open a couple of inches. "Yeah?" he asked me.

"Mrs. Slocum?" I asked.

"She ain't here," he said. "She's at work, over to the Vets." He slouched against the door frame.

"You're Mr. Slocum?"

"Hey, what is this, some kind of freaking survey?"

I frowned and patted my pockets. "Mrs. Beatrix Slocum?" I asked, doubtfully.

"Naah, you got the wrong house," he said. He opened the storm door a little more and

leaned out to flick the butt of his cigarette away.

I yanked the door open and jammed him back into the hallway with my shoulder. Jimmy kept his balance and went into a crouch, bringing his hands up fast. I punched him in the chest as hard as I could and he staggered. I slammed him in the Adam's apple with the heel of my hand and elbowed the door closed behind me. Jimmy backed away, holding his throat with both hands. His eyes glittered, and he shifted his weight to kick out at my knee. I sideswiped his ankle with my left arm, grabbed his foot with my right, and scooped him off his feet. He went down twisting, trying to break the fall, but he landed square on his hipbone and I still had a grip on his ankle. I wrenched him over onto his stomach so I could drop my knee into the small of his back and pin him to the floor, squirming. We were both breathing heavily.

"I could take you," he whispered, hoarsely.

"Yeah, but there are two of us," I said. I got the 9mm Smith out from under my coat and put the muzzle up against the base of his skull, just behind his ear. I cocked the hammer back with my right thumb.

"Jesus," he whimpered, closing his eyes. I saw a tear trickle

across the bridge of his nose.

"You made a lot of the wrong people mad, Jimmy, when you whacked Ernie Bacon," I said.

I felt his body stiffen underneath me. "Ernie?" He sounded genuinely puzzled. "You got the wrong guy," he said.

"Oh, I got the right guy," I said. "I've just got him in the wrong place."

"No, wait," he said. "I don't know nothing about it, I swear."

"But she asked you to kill him for her, didn't she?"

He started to turn his head, and I forced his face back down onto the floor with the muzzle of the gun. "Aw, listen, man," he whined, "that was all a long time ago. Forever. Anyway, the son of a bitch got me first, sent me up for five years' hard time. Wanted all that white meat to himself is what it was, if you want to know the truth."

"That's what I came to hear, Jimmy," I told him.

"Well, you're hearing it," he said. "Come on, gimme a break."

"You going to finger her for me, Jimmy?"

"I don't want nothing to do with that crazy broad," he muttered. "She can fool herself all she wants, but she ain't fooling me. She was the one sharing his bed, and she's the one wanted him dead. Once burned,

twice shy, is what I say. I shoulda bailed out when I had the chance."

The thing was, I believed him. I sat back on my heels and got to my feet. Jimmy stayed where he was. "Don't worry about it," I said. "I didn't come here to kill you. I just had to clear up some loose ends." I stuck the automatic back in my waistband and started for the door.

"Hey," Jimmy said, raising himself up on his hands and staring at me over his shoulder. "Cruddy line of work you're in, ain't it?"

I looked down at him and grinned. "It has its moments," I told him.

"Go over that for me again," I said.

"Okay," Bud, the construction foreman, said, "here's the way I see it." He had the wiring diagram pinned up on a piece of corkboard inside the trailer, but it was still Greek to me. "You got your charges here, the detonators here, the relays here." He pointed. "The box is here." He pointed again. "You run power through the box. You test with a low voltage. The relays are solid-state transistors. They're your fail-safe, your impedance. If you jury-rigged those relays,

the test voltage could set off the detonators."

"So you have to physically get at the relays, or substitute bogus ones?"

"Not necessarily. It might be possible to take them out of the loop."

"How?" Phil Magruder asked.

"High voltage," Bud said, "or some device that fused the ceramics, made the relays malfunction. You could even use a solenoid in the line, like putting a copper penny behind a fifteen-amp household fuse that keeps blowing, so it can carry a heavier load. A lot of residential electrical fires start that way."

"How would you activate the solenoid?" I asked.

"Good question," Bud said. "And you'd have to time it right, too. But, hell, maybe something as simple as an electronic garage door opener, or the remote control off a TV set, if you were close enough. The tricky part is setting it up in the first place."

"And you checked on Chuck Valentine?" Magruder asked me, for what must have been the third or fourth time.

"He called in sick yesterday," I told him, again. "He wasn't at work, and he wasn't at home."

"What a can of worms," Bud muttered to himself. "His own son-in-law."

Magruder looked at me. "You'd better make those phone calls now, Jack," he said.

I'd never met Ernie's wife, not face to face. I introduced myself, and Dolores Bacon introduced me to her two daughters, Susan and Betsy. Betsy remembered me from my two telephone calls, and thanked me. I remembered what she'd said the day before, when I'd called her the first time, but I didn't bring it up.

"So, where's Mr. Wizard?" I asked her.

She looked at me blankly.

"Right here," Phil Magruder said, walking in. He had a Saugus police captain with him, and Chuck Valentine was between the two of them, looking trapped. Magruder had a small plastic box in his hand, no bigger than a pack of Marlboros.

"That it?" I asked.

"Yep." Magruder held it up. "Solid-state transmitter. Signal range is about a hundred feet."

Betsy looked at her husband. "Chuck?" she asked him apprehensively. "What's going on?"

"Your dad's death wasn't an accident," I told her. "He was murdered."

Betsy shrank back from me. "What do you mean? What does it have to do with Chuck?"

"Chuck was the patsy," I

said. "He hot-wired the circuits on the demolition charges."

"But *why*?" Her eyes were large and fearful.

"Because of what Ernie did to you and your sister," I said. "From the time you were little."

Betsy exchanged a shocked look with Susan. "But nobody knew," Betsy squeaked. "Nobody would have believed us."

"He didn't hear it from you," I said. "He heard it from your mother, just like Jimmy Slocum did." I swung around to the widow. "You might just as well have pulled the trigger yourself, Dolores," I told her.

She stared back at me, her lip quivering. "He destroyed my family," she whispered.

"He didn't do it by himself," I said.

* * *

The poker game Monday night started out on a subdued note.

"Sorry to hear about Ernie," Duke Skinner remarked. He was the lawyer.

"So was I," I said. And in more ways than one, I thought to myself.

"Damn shame," commented Ed Logan, the bartender. "Ernie was a great guy."

I glanced over at Phil Ma-gruder, who was shuffling one of the new decks. "Too bad he didn't know any better than to draw to an inside straight," I muttered.

Phil squared the deck and slapped it down on the table. "Let's cut the crap and deal the cards," he said.

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FICTION

The Six Million Dollar Gingerbread Man

by Dan Crawford



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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Once upon a time there lived a very up-to-date king and queen who had read their history books and knew all the angles. When their daughter was born, they made absolutely certain to invite every wicked fairy in the kingdom to her christening, so as to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Unfortunately, this left no room for the good fairies. You guessed it. When it came time to bless the infant, and all the wicked fairies had lined up to give their gifts (an ability to look good in a cowboy hat, a magic pink skateboard, that kind of thing), a good fairy named Bonnie Bluebonnet sneaked in and put her curse on the baby, saying, "This girl will grow up to marry a handsome prince and live happily ever after."

The queen was distraught. "But that's so old fashioned!" she cried.

Fortunately, there was one wicked fairy left to give a blessing. She could not take back the good fairy's curse but she could modify it, and said, "But the handsome prince will not have two ugly older brothers, and he will not be heir to a huge kingdom." This was some consolation.

The wicked fairy who had spoken last, and whose name was Totonna, thus officially became the child's fairy godmother. Totonna, though, was not much of a fairy, being both scatterbrained and not terribly bright. So when it came time for the princess to get an education, her parents sent her to learn from a more up-to-date fairy named Reanor, who promised to instill in the child basic skills like obedience to her parents, respect for her elders, unquestioning civility, and so on.

What the king and queen did not know, however, was that Reanor was a very wicked fairy indeed and was required to kill a princess every twenty-five years in order to preserve her youth and beauty. She had recently killed a Princess Foane of Bell, and was able to wait. Her next due date fell on the princess's eighteenth birthday, which Reanor thought rather amusing.

The princess was known as Yevonne, and she grew up in Reanor's cottage, Reanor having told the king and queen that she must have complete control over the princess in order to raise her properly. Yevonne was never told she was a princess, or even where she'd come from, and gradually decided that her parents were dead or uninterested. She worked as Reanor's servant, washing dishes and windows, sweeping the floor and the chimney, and, of course, sitting in the cinders. Her life was brightened only by the beauty

of the view from the cottage (which was thirteen stories high and thatched with hair from all the princesses Reanor had killed) and by occasional visits from Totonna, who, when she remembered it, would drop by with a present for her goddaughter. (Totonna did not always remember, though Yevonne had, in fact, been born on Christmas Day, which ought to have given the wicked old airhead a double reason to think of it.)

One Christmas (in fact, *the* Christmas, though Yevonne didn't know it yet) Yevonne got up early and decided to trot through the forest to see Totonna and find out what her fairy godmother had gotten for her this year. When she had trotted all that way, however, she found that Totonna had quite forgotten the whole business.

"Oh, my!" said Totonna, once she figured out what her goddaughter was driving at. "Oh dear, oh dear!" She had thought it was July or August (completely missing the point of all that snow) and didn't have a present ready. Fortunately, however, she had robbed an arts and crafts supply store the day before and had a number of Styrofoam cones. She quickly painted one green, sprinkled a little glitter dust on it, and gave this to Yevonne, mentioning that, after all, it was the thought that counted.

Halfway home, Yevonne couldn't hold it in any longer. She sat on a fallen log and looked at her gift. "This," she said, "is depressing. I get an average of .6 Christmas and birthday presents per annum, and I have a distinct aversion to cheap Styrofoam handicrafts. If I were inclined toward sentimentality, I might well bawl my head off."

She threw the cone on the ground, and a young man who was passing by picked it up. "Pardon me, miss," he said, tipping his crown, "did you perchance drop this here Styrofoam Christmas tree on the ground?"

"I did not," said Yevonne. She had never been taught not to speak to strangers because she never met any strangers. "I threw it."

"I see," said the young man. After a slight pause, he went on. "Are you, by any chance, er, if this isn't too personal a question, a princess?"

"Do I look like a princess?" Yevonne demanded.

"No," said the young man, as nauseatingly truthful as any handsome prince ought to be. "You are neither graceful nor particularly dainty, as a princess is, in general. Yet you are not unpretty, in a

coarse sort of way. I suppose there must be some princesses like that."

"Well, I amn't," said Yevonne. "I am a norphan."

"A..." said the young man. "Oh. An orphan."

"Yes, a norphan," said Yevonne. "What are you?"

"As anyone can tell, I am a handsome prince," said the handsome prince. "Prince Jack is my name. My fairy godmother, Bonnie Bluebonnet, told me I would find a princess if I walked here until I found a Christmas tree. But perhaps she did not have reference to Styrofoam ones."

"I wouldn't think so," Yevonne agreed. "Well, I'd love to stay and chat because you're not bad looking for a handsome prince, but there's butter to be churned. Ta."

"Ta," said Prince Jack.

And they went their separate ways.

It was still early when Yevonne got home, so she was surprised to find that Reanor was awake. Reanor never got up early even if there was a sale on ground toad. Furthermore, she was hunting through the drawers and cabinets in the kitchen.

"Oh, good," said Reanor, looking over her left shoulder as Yevonne came in. "You're just in time. Today's the day."

There was something in Reanor's voice that told Yevonne the fairy did not mean a day for birthday cakes or carol singing. "What day?" she asked.

"The day I kill a princess to ensure a long life," Reanor said, flipping through the knife drawer. "A long life for me, that is."

"How interesting," said Yevonne, watching Reanor take down the large cutting board. "Have you bought your princess yet? I doubt there'll be any left in the stores by this time."

"Oh, I got one a long time ago," Reanor said, getting out the ingredients for the dumplings. "You might say I've been fattening her up. As a matter of fact, dear, you are the princess, and you are going to die today."

"Fancy that," said Yevonne. "Me, a princess. A local one?"

"The only child of our king and queen," Reanor replied. "Where have you put the caraway seed for the sauerkraut, you wicked girl?"

Yevonne took the caraway seed from its shelf. "Thank you," said the wicked fairy. "Would you go better with garlic or with oregano?"

"Garlic," said Yevonne. "I don't like oregano."

"Garlic it is," said Reanor. "Just hand me that stuffing recipe, would you?"

Yevonne handed Reanor the cookbook and then excused herself. She ran quickly up to the thirteenth floor of the cottage, just three steps ahead of the wicked fairy. Locking herself into the room at the top of the stairs, she grabbed up the foghorn Reanor kept to warn away bats and called out for aid, assistance, and any kind of help that could be delivered as immediately as possible.

She was relieved to see two small hunting parties converge on the scene. Unfortunately, the handsome princes in charge of these recognized each other as old rivals and started a battle then and there for the right to save Yevonne's life.

"Be up as soon as we get this settled," they shouted to the captive princess.

"I hate to meddle in a matter of protocol," she called back, hearing Reanor kicking at the door, "but could you send me up a bit of your army to help me out in the meanwhile?"

This seemed entirely reasonable, so each prince sent about five hunters to climb silently up and aid the princess. Disdaining the stairs, these ten stalwarts started up the outside of the cottage, bellowing insults at each other as they went.

"Hey!" Yevonne shouted. "Sneak up on her more quietly, can't you?"

But Reanor had heard them, too, and she shouted a magic spell. The ten men turned into cows and dropped from the walls, sustaining minor injuries and greatly distracting the princes who employed them.

However, Prince Jack had also heard the sounds of battle, and of cows falling from the air. Realizing that he had been suckered by one of the oldest tricks in the book—the princess in disguise—he ran all the way to the cottage of the wicked fairy.

Being a practical young man, he hurried inside and ran up the stairs. When he reached the room at the top, Reanor had broken down the door. Yevonne had found one of the magic swords Reanor had hidden in the storeroom and was fighting it out with her, sword to wand.

"Hi there!" Yevonne called, when she saw Prince Jack. "Glad to see you again! Guess what! I'm a princess, after all."

The prince nodded and leaned against the door jamb.

"Well, don't just stand there," she went on. "Get in here and rescue me so we can live happily ever after."

"In a minute," panted the prince. "I'm out of breath."

Reanor reached back to swing her wand at that moment, though, and Prince Jack found enough energy to stick out a foot and trip her. Yevonne leaned in for the coup de grace and then rolled the fairy's body down the stairs.

"Oh, very nice," said Prince Jack. "I haven't seen such nice swordwork since Prince Timothy's fencing championship."

"Thank you," said Yevonne, wiping off the magic sword. "Now, I'm not too clear on what happens next. Do you marry me and carry me off to your kingdom?"

"Well, actually," said Prince Jack, "I was rather hoping you'd marry me and we could use your kingdom. See, my father has forty daughters and thirty-eight sons. That doesn't leave much kingdom for me."

"Oh, okay," said Yevonne. "I hear I'm an only child. Are you sure your parents won't mind?"

"Mind?" said the prince. "They won't even notice. Confidentially, I think they've lost half a dozen or so along the way already."

"Okay," said Yevonne. "Let's get busy with the living happily ever after part. The first thing I'm going to do is build a castle big enough to invite *all* the fairies to."

"Very sensible," said Prince Jack. And it was, too.

FICTION

Ditchwater Blonde

by
**Mike
Drummond**



Illustration by Judy Mitchell

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The call came in at eleven, and they traced me to Dagmar's. I was finishing a late breakfast special in the back booth where it was warm. The temperature had dipped outside, and the falling snow was covering Main Street with a milky glaze.

It was the Peters girl again, not that she was still a girl or even went by the name Peters any more, but that was the name that impressed me first, or the most, I'm not sure which. She lived on Whitmore Street, a two block stretch of decaying Victorian houses whose occupants had steadfastly repulsed every attempt at yuppie gentrification. To be in the northern California foothills, in Del Oro, on Whitmore Street, was to be on the skids somehow: on welfare, on disability, on a stingy retirement, or suffering from complete poverty of the body and soul, on drugs or alcohol.

Karin Peters' excuse for being there was no excuse in my book, but some bleeding heart liberal would probably chew me out if I said so in public. Karin had three kids by three fathers, and from the little I knew, she still changed men the way I change underwear. Which, so you don't get the wrong idea, I do a lot. And they're all a sorry bunch of saggy, baggy losers . . . the men, that is.

I parked the squad car in the driveway, not worried about being in anybody's way. The two cars already in the driveway were jacked up and on blocks and had been for years. My main worry was whether my own tires would still be attached when I came out.

The house, which at one time must have been something special, was something else now. It was carved up into units connected by a cold and drafty hallway that zigzagged the length of the building. But the hallway was warm compared to Karin Peters' place. A four-year-old in diapers let me into the darkened interior. He or she, I couldn't tell, trotted off below the haze of cigarette smoke that hung over the room and sat on a sleeping yellow dog in front of a television set.

There was no one in the kitchen except the roaches, so I knocked on the bedroom door. The door swung open on its own. Karin's baby was wrapped in a blanket and sleeping in a cardboard box in the corner. A cat or something slipped into the shadows near the closet door. Karin was face down on the floor, sobbing softly. When my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, I saw she was lying in the center of a crude ritualistic circle outlined with black paint on the brown

carpet. So this is the New Age, I thought.

"Karin, it's me," I said.

There was no need to identify myself any further. Of the men in her life, she'd certainly known me the longest, from a professional point of view. My profession, by the way, not hers. She did a half-hearted pushup and rolled over to face me. Karin Peters was a mess. She looked like she'd worked a jar of Vaseline into her limp blonde hair, her eyes were puffy and bloodshot, and she had a raging cold sore on her lower lip. I wondered why so many men had found this setup inviting.

"Where's Athena?"

"Theena." Karin shook her head and sobbed.

"When you called the switchboard, you told Mona she was missing. How long has she been gone?"

"Don't know. One, two days maybe," she sniffed.

"You're some mother, you know that?"

She didn't say anything. We both knew the truth. At eight years old, little Athena was the nearest thing to an adult in that house. Probably cooked all the meals that got cooked, and even saw that the rent got paid out of the welfare check. But she was too small to do much about Karin's choice of men.

Athena was an imaginative traveler, too. Ran away from home regularly, using a different technique each time. I found her hitchhiking on the interstate, already halfway to Reno, when she was six. Another time she'd emptied her mother's purse and talked the station agent into selling her a one-way bus ticket to San Francisco. Would have made it, too, if she hadn't fallen asleep on the bus.

I could see how Athena would find sleeping in a doorway preferable to Karin's hovel. Still, she was only eight years old.

"What was she wearing?"

"Don't know."

"If you looked through her things, could you tell what was missing?"

Karin stared at me blankly. That was a tough one for her.

"How about a recent picture?" I asked. "From school, maybe?"

"Sure."

Karin shambled into the kitchen and pulled open three drawers before she found the one she wanted. The jumbled pictures were sticky to the touch, but the young face smiling out at me with sad, faded eyes was the little girl I remembered.

"Any money gone?" I asked.

"Isn't any. I spent a night in Reno."

Blew your damned welfare check on slot machines and a few drinks, I thought.

"I'll talk to the neighbors," was what I said.

It was unpleasantly tropical in Miss Hennessey's flat. The jungle smell of decaying vegetation was coupled with the acrid odor of some prehistoric disinfectant. I doubted that the windows had been opened in decades.

Miss Hennessey had seemed ancient to me when she taught my fourth grade class, and that was forty years ago. Prim and proper, and as rigid as her ever-present ruler. She didn't belong in that neighborhood. Why she continued to live there was beyond me . . . probably had nowhere else to go.

"Gustav," she said, "something bad has happened to that child. I know it has."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Athena's a bright child, sensitive, too," she said, patting my hand lightly. "You were a sensitive child yourself, although I doubt that you'd admit it even now, and behind closed doors."

She was right on both counts.

"Was there anything unusual lately, Miss Hennessey?"

"In a neighborhood where unusual is the norm, I'd have to think for a moment . . . about

anyone other than Athena, that is."

I waited while she hoisted a porcelain pot with both hands and poured the tea. Dull purple veins stood out on the backs of her hands like tangled ropes.

"That incident in the street, of course, was highly unusual," Miss Hennessey said, shaking her head.

I waited again until she stirred two tablespoons of blackberry jam into her cup and was ready to continue.

"The child laid herself down in the middle of Whitmore Street just opposite the old Monroe place, near the corner. Why, any automobile turning that corner would certainly have run over her. And when I pointed that out to her, she told me that was exactly what she wanted. She said she wanted 'it' to be over."

"Any idea what 'it' might have been?"

"Well, at my age, it might be the tedious repetitions of life, those daily annoyances and reminders that my world isn't as perfect and safe and happy as I'd like it to be. But for a child that age . . . to be without hope."

Miss Hennessey sighed and looked away.

"So you noticed nothing unusual going on across the hallway?"

"No, I don't think it was that. The child coped with her mother and the others. You know, the men."

Her eyes drifted upward as she remembered.

"There were some arguments in the hallway, loud ones between Athena and her mother. But I never saw her strike the child or, for that matter, win an argument. The child was quick, and her mind was clear. I think her problem had to do with school. Children can be very cruel, Gustav, in case you have forgotten."

Instinctively my hand reached for my malformed upper lip. A salt and pepper mustache covered it now, but the harelip had got me in more schoolyard fights . . . senseless fights that had nothing to do with what I'd done, or who I was, and everything to do with how I looked. Miss Hennessey didn't have to remind me. I guess I'd seen Athena so often and for so long that I hadn't really looked at her. I fished Athena's sticky photo from my pocket and stared at it. Miss Hennessey did, too.

"She must resemble her father, whoever he may have been," said Miss Hennessey. "It's an interesting mix, she's such a beautiful child. Although her hair is . . . untamed."

From the looks of things, Athena's father had been black. Her skin was like coffee cut with cream, her hair a wild tangle of auburn curls, and her eyes a startling pale blue. In a lily-white community like Del Oro, she was bound to stand out. Which is one thing a small child doesn't want to do. If Athena'd had the stable home life that I had had, she'd have had a fighting chance. But with Karin like a millstone around her young neck, I couldn't imagine it. Couldn't understand why the social workers hadn't already whisked those kids away.

But that's another fight with the liberals, and an endless one.

The other tenants were variations on Karin Peters, and no help at all. Most of what they saw and heard was accessible only within the dim viewing room of their own skulls.

I decided to check in at Ophir Hill Elementary, Athena's only other known haunt. It was four blocks over, at the top of the hill, and luckily, old Herm had run the snowplow that far already.

I slipped into four-wheel-drive and cut through the small parking lot to the Irrigation District service road that parallels the flume. Del Oro's whole water supply comes from that

ditch. It's a legacy from the hydraulic goldmines of a hundred years ago. Water had once flowed through ditches, flumes, and tunnels through solid rock to fuel the search for gold. Now the same water fueled a local building boom.

As a boy, I'd fished the flume, although there had been much better spots farther downstream beyond the iron bars of the storm drain where the irrigation water joined Del Oro Creek. From there it rushed along the edge of town toward another county, and then another, on its way toward the Pacific.

How much geography could an eight-year-old girl know? Did she believe the old saw that said to follow water downstream and eventually you'd come to civilization? Nothing civilized about the gang of schoolkids throwing snowballs on the schoolhouse steps.

I parked in the school's tiny lot and went inside. School was over and the kids were outside, and Penny Clarke, the third grade teacher, was bundling up, getting ready to leave.

"Understand you're going to be a grandma any day now, Penny."

"Baby's due on the fourth, Gus. No crime in that, is there?"

We both smiled. I had known

Penny from when she was a Putnam and we'd sat in the same classroom in that very school.

"I see you're on your way out, so I'll be brief. It's about Athena DuBois."

Penny frowned.

"How is Theena?" she asked.

"I was about to ask you the same thing."

"She's such a bright girl, full of promise. But her attendance is spotty."

"She likes to travel."

"I know," she smiled. "Even when she makes it to school, she doesn't always stay put. Wanders off into the woods, down by the flume. Moving water fascinates her."

"Hmm. Well, I'm the same way with fire," I said.

Penny looked at me funny.

"In the fireplace... I can watch it for hours," I continued.

"Quite the cheap date, aren't you, Gus?" she smiled.

Penny and I had never dated, I'd never dated a hometown girl. But of the girls I grew up with, she came closest to being a friend. Penny had raised her own brood of five and must have fostered another thirty over the years. And she still had the nerves to handle a room full of eight-year-olds.

"Anything else about Athena?" I asked. "Anything at all?"

"Well, she was a bit sensitive about her appearance. I mean, in a room full of towheads like I've got this year, she does stand out."

"No question."

Penny shook her head. "She tried to correct that last week, you know. Must have stuck her head in a bucket of bleach. Her hair had all the color sucked from it. It was the color of water, but of course she insisted she was a blonde, like her mother."

"Of course. Does she have any close friends?"

"None that I know of. She's a loner. A few of the older children tease her some, but no one in my class picks on her. I won't stand for it. Besides, she's big for her age."

The snow was still falling when I got back to the office. A civilian car sat in my space in the carport, but the make was common enough that I couldn't connect it with its owner immediately.

I parked in the snow, blocking the way, looking forward to the inevitable confrontation. But then I caught sight of the county logo on the offending car's door and the pint-sized Stetson on the dashboard. I knew Supervisor Schell was the culprit.

Willie Schell is a fake cowboy

with a silver belt buckle the size of a pie pan, a tobacco-stained smile, and all the sincerity and depth of your average cheerleader. He was also up for reelection to the Vato County board of supervisors, and likely to make it. I pulled my vehicle back to give him clearance. No use putting obstacles in my own way during next month's budget review.

Inside, I dodged Willie and got on the phone right away. He stuck his head in and gave me a "hidey, sheriff" from the doorway, but I pretended to be concentrating on whoever was on the other end of the line.

I still had the phone to my ear when Mona came in with my coffee mug full of hot chocolate. She gave me one of those looks. The one that told me I ought to punch at least one of the buttons if I was going to fake a call.

I got Athena's description out to the wire, assigned my female deputy, Dunne, to the case, and had Mona follow up with the bus depot and the highway patrol guys on the interstate. An eight-year-old hitchhiking on the highway in a snowstorm would be easy to spot. I was banking on someone's having seen her either northbound toward Reno, or south toward Sacramento or San Francisco.

We didn't turn a hair,

bleached-blond or otherwise, during the next twenty-four hours, and it was about then that I got this feeling she was already wherever she was going.

It was a funny feeling, eerie really, not like hunches I get sometimes when I'm deep into a case. As I looked at Athena's picture, a plug popped loose inside me somewhere, and sadness flooded out. If I'd blinked my eyes then, I know a tear would have fallen. For Athena DuBois? For me? Who can really say. Then, as quickly as it had come, the feeling left me, and my head felt cold-remedy-light. The tension in my shoulders was gone, and I was, well, I was at peace. As for Athena, I hoped she was warm and dry and full of food and sitting somewhere in the sun, although from the weather report that would have put her in Texas or points east that day.

I didn't tell anyone about my feeling then. They would have thought I was spending too much time on the leftover-hippie-New-Age-psyche side of town. Which I don't. We've got a ton of them up here in the hills. All living in yurts and barns, eating organic, listening to rocks, and seeing auras. Mine wasn't some mystic experience, it was just a funny feeling.

* * *

A week later the snow was still on the ground. The temperature hadn't been above freezing for six days. The night before, the town water supply had frozen solid, and the irrigation workers were on their way out to break up the ice jams in the flumes. It had been the main topic of conversation on the local radio station all morning, not that I got to listen to it. The sheriff's office was deluged with emergency calls from people who suddenly couldn't flush their toilets and demanded to know the reason why.

I felt like telling them that while I was a lawman, I couldn't do anything about waiving the laws of physics. But I didn't because that would just be digging myself into a hole for the sake of a few moments' pleasure. I listened politely and gave them the Irrigation District's number.

At ten o'clock a call came in from Boggs, the reporter at the *Dispatch*.

"How reliable is this Karin Peters?" he asked.

"Why, did you lend her some money?"

"I'm not as stupid as I look, Gus. This has to do with her primogeniture, one Athena DuBois . . . great name, eh?"

"What about the kid?"

My deputy had kept me briefed, but there hadn't been any news except that Karin was alternating between hysteria and catatonia.

"Peters claims she's hearing voices, or rather one voice," Boggs said.

"Little Theena's, no doubt."

"You got it. The voice says, 'Come and get me, Momma.' And it only speaks to Peters when she's in a trance."

"A trance. I hope you're not smoking that stuff, too, Boggs. There are already enough typos in the *Dispatch* as it is."

"Not very kind words, Gus. Especially to someone who's doing your legwork for you."

He had me there.

I got the details, which didn't really explain why she'd called the newspaper instead of me, and agreed to meet him at the scene in an hour. When I heard where it was, I told him I'd be driving my Jimmy and not the cruiser.

Piety Flats is a relatively secluded meadow area high up in the western Sierra Nevada watershed. If you didn't know about it, you would never guess it was there. Del Oro's water supply flows from a network of lakes higher up and is transported by flume and canal along the canyon wall where it disappears for a time in a thir-

teen hundred foot pipe/tunnel through solid granite. In the summertime the meadow makes a great picnic area for hikers and an occasional campsite for squatters living out of their cars. I'd roused a few from time to time, but there was never any real trouble. Now some of those folks had auras I could smell, not that I wanted to.

I followed a single set of tire tracks up the access road until I topped a rise. Below me the trees gave way to meadowland covered in a blue ice mantle. Boggs's van was already on the far side of the meadow, and, I could see three figures on foot, making their way slowly through the frozen snow toward the wall of granite on the meadow's north side.

High above them, two specks of orange were slowly moving toward me along the flume line in the distance. I could see their company truck parked on the narrow service road. That must have been some ride up there in the snow. Frozen plumes of water arched over the edge of the flumes where the ice was bad. I knew bad ice first hand. As a youngster I'd spent two years with the Irrigation District, and today especially, I didn't envy them their job. They were after anchor ice—the ice that forms on the bot-

tom and sides and expands until all the water is forced from the channel. The two-man team was dressed in chest-waders and bundled up against the cold. The front man swung a single bit axe to break up the ice, and the back man heaved the chunks of ice and snow over the side with a square point shovel. Definitely not a job you'd make a long career of.

From the looks of it, Boggs and the others were headed toward the flume where it disappeared into the mountain's granite side. This was beginning to have all the earmarks of a wild goose chase. There was no way an eight-year-old girl would run away to this place. Not at this time of year.

I parked near Boggs's van and headed after them. I was able to move a lot faster than they did for a couple of reasons: I'm in better shape than that couch potato Boggs, and I'd had three bodies ahead of me to pack down the otherwise virgin snow. Even so, I was puffing when I caught up with them near the base of the rocks.

Karin was down in the snow making a snow angel by flapping her arms and legs around, or at least that's that I would have thought if she was face up, which she wasn't. With her head in the snow, she didn't hear me coming, but the other

two did. Boggs wasn't surprised to see me although the other civilian was. I didn't recognize her, but I figured her for Whitmore Street. She was a fat number, five two, about four hundred pounds, with a pudgy, round face that was beginning to feel the pull of gravity. She wasn't the vocal type, and Boggs did the intros.

"Sheriff, this is Karin's sister, Casballah. Karin can't come to the phone now herself, she's in a trance."

"I'll leave my name and planet at the tone," I said, nodding toward Casballah.

Casballah blinked and looked away. She resembled Karin about as much as Karin's three kids resembled each other. If they were related, I'd bet their family tree was in a bigger tangle than Athena's hair.

"Could have done this at the Miner's Park in town," I said, nodding toward Karin. "Plenty of snow there."

Karin stopped flailing and sat up. Snow stuck to her uncombed hair in dirty clumps.

"I hear her. I hear her. She's here," she said.

The only sound was the rhythmic whack of axe on ice from the irrigation boys, and I told her so. She seemed to see me for the first time, and tears welled up in her eyes.

"No, I do," she cried.
"Theena's here."

"Why?" I asked. "Why here?"

Karin sobbed and sank back into the snow.

"Theena liked it here," Casballah said. "We came here once in the springtime."

"I'll buy that," I said. "But how does a kid get out here in this weather?"

Casballah must have used up her vocabulary for the day; she had nothing more to say.

"Where, Karin?" I said impatiently.

Her eyes moved upward, not toward the sky, but to the granite cliff.

"No way she got up there without wings," said Boggs.

"There's nothing up there but the flume and the water tunnel, Karin," I said.

"I can feel her calling me," she said.

"Too bad none of us thought to bring our portable phones with us," I said. I'd had it with this seance.

I questioned the two women for another ten minutes but got nowhere except angry. That, at least, helped keep me warm. Overhead, the irrigation crew was close enough for me to recognize. Ollie, the shovel-man, waved. I waved back and decided to cut my losses.

"I'm going back, Boggs," I said. "See you in church."

I left them there and returned to the truck. I slammed the door, turned the key angrily, and revved her up, but something kept me from throwing it into gear. This sideshow called for way too much effort on Karin's part. She knew something. I sat back and let the engine idle while I watched the sad pantomime from a distance. The heater had time to warm the cab and dry out my socks before the shouting started.

I cracked the door to hear what was going on. The boys up on the flume were standing near the trash rack that keeps debris from floating into the tunnel. They were yelling and waving their arms, and from the looks on their faces I could tell they hadn't struck gold.

The group on the ground was agitated when I got back.

"She's up there, Gus," Boggs said.

The crew lowered the service ladder on one of the stanchions, and I climbed up for a look. There wasn't much of a place for me to stand as the icy water rushed by.

"Damn near sliced it through," the ax-man said.

"Looks like whoever it was is beyond feeling pain now," Ollie, the shovel-man, said.

A twisted child's body was covered with twigs and trash

and frozen high against the iron rack. I brushed the snow from the head and saw the wild blonde hair that her third grade teacher said was the color of water.

Boggs had the good taste to avoid all the lurid possibilities of the story, and I'm thankful for that. Athena Du-Bois deserved more dignity in death than she'd had in life. Some of us can only achieve true dignity in death. Back among the living, but not necessarily conscious, her mother stuck to her story of psychic intuition. But, I ask you, if she's so damn psychic, why did she pick the men she did, or live the way she lived, or let her daughter fall into the hands of an unknown killer? I don't buy it.

The D.A. didn't think much of the coincidental timing of Karin's seance at Piety Flats, either. Everybody in Del Oro with a radio knew the irrigation boys would be up there chopping ice, but only the murderer could know what they might find in the trash rack. My bet is that Karin was trying to chalk up a few points on the nut-case side of the equation.

Little Theena was suicidal, you say? Maybe so, I don't doubt old Miss Hennessey's judgment for a moment. But it

was an awfully difficult suicide for an eight-year-old to perform, given the circumstances. When we found her body, she was clad in lightweight summer clothes and one shoe. She didn't make it to Piety Flats hopping on one foot, someone drove her. Since I found the missing shoe in the jumble at Karin's apartment, I have a good idea who the chauffeur was. By the way, the pink lace from that missing shoe had been wrapped and knotted garrotte-style around Theena's little neck.

Karin didn't crack under questioning, or at least she didn't admit to anything much. I think she's going for an insanity plea. Which is the liberal's way of lessening the punishment for the perp, without lessening the severity of the crime from the victim's point of view. She'll probably win that one, but at least she lost those other kids. They're tucked in warm and cosy with my old friend Penny Clarke.

Just as well, too; Karin claims she is spending most of her time in a parallel universe. Which is the kind of universe I'd like to live in, a parallel one. Even a perpendicular one would be okay. Any universe where the angles are predictable and where things are straight and orderly and just.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

Flowers for an Angel

by Nigel Morland



Illustration by Laurie Davis

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Some women have said that Mrs. Pym was never young, that even in her initial stages she was probably an elderly baby. Obviously, such women should drink their milk out of saucers; still, it is a fact that Mrs. Pym was somehow stolid, enormously capable, and frequently harsh, even in the early 1920's when she must have been around thirty.

She affected the same ugly tweeds, the same enchantingly insane hats, and the same air of magnificent omnipotence as she does today. But her hair was brown then, with only the faintest touch of her current grayness. Her speech was as biting, and her contempt for authority and inefficiency as ready as on that notable day in 1935 when she crashed the shocked portals of New Scotland Yard, the first woman ever to hold rank in Central C.I.D., where, in these present jittery times of nuclear fission and H-bombs, she is Mrs. Assistant-Commissioner Pym.

In those extraordinary 1920's she had drifted away from the job of chief secretary to the Director of Remounts (War Office, Special Service) in China, where they were still talking about her merciless "I think we're supposed to mount the British Army on Mongolian ponies; God knows why, but we Islanders are notable at confounding the enemy—particularly with the war over and done with!" She arrived, of all places in this world, as a woman detective-sergeant in the surprised ranks of the Shanghai Municipal Police Force.

I was still a cub reporter on the Shanghai *Evening Star*. "Still," because I had publicly stated that Benjamin Cudworth, that aristocratic darling of the Shanghai Club, was selling guns to Wu Peifu (which later turned out to be the truth). It made me less than the dust beneath worthy British shoes—me, the Chinese, the Grifpins, and the miserable itinerants who were not even Shanghaianders. But it was enough for Mrs. Pym; if she'd been in India she would have turned up at a Hindu dinner party with an Untouchable. That seemingly granite exterior regarded all stiles as something to help lame dogs over—even if she usually kicked them on their way.

I used to go round to her flat in Bubbling Well Road, where I could watch the races, or the golfers in the middle of the central race course. She always had a liking for reporters—wasn't she one herself for a year?—though what she told me about the local social set should not have been poured into my nineteen-year-old ears: I

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thought the country club people were next to holiness—*she* stripped off their outward façades with the zest of a kid tearing the wrapping off candy.

Her private life was a mystery to me. I knew Richard Pym had been a retired ironmaster, that he had died a few months after their marriage (the country club went to town on that!), and that because the Municipal Council was regretting her appointment she was given no more than routine assignments—mostly traffic violations and such things—which were not C.I.D. work at all.

But when Klara Dimmick came drifting down the Whangpoo one chill winter's night, it became Mrs. Pym's business. She and I were in a large sampan, illegally moored off the Customs' Wharf. She was bartering for some rather nice jade which the boatman said was his father's—he claimed to be a refugee from Nanking. I daresay the jade was loot, since Wu Pei-fu was on the rampage: when those old-time *tuchuns* broke out, it was every native for himself.

An uproar from the family end of the sampan brought Mrs. Pym from under the reed-matted midstructure, and there was Klara, large, Nordic, and beautiful, sitting gracefully in the stern of a dinghy, drifting superbly on the muddy, littered current.

The dinghy was gaffed. Mrs. Pym craned over to have a look, with the help of my pocket torch.

"Klara Dimmick," I said, "wife of—"

"All right, son, I know Dimmick of China Oil. H'm . . . that looks like a dagger wound in her front."

"Murder?"

"Could be." She snapped at the chattering sampan family in Shanghai dialect which, naturally, none of them understood; but her tone promoted something like silence. "Showy piece, isn't she?" Mrs. Pym's sniff was loud. A violent woman herself, she dislikes physically ostentatious human beings. "Lug her to the bank and we'll have a look-see."

You can't keep anything quiet in China. Every idler on the Bund had gathered round when we checked over Klara on the edge of the Customs' Wharf. The Chinese spectators were I-told-you-so-ing for all they were worth because, they maintained, her red hair was the unluckiest thing that could happen to her. I suggested the dagger wound was more immediately so. Mrs. Pym grimaced.

"Don't be childish, boy." She picked out an intelligent looking coolie and told him to nip along to the Dzing-boo-vaung for

help—the very mention of the police station scared him off. Finally a stout Chinese who looked like, and admitted he was, a compradore agreed to do the job if she paid for a rickshaw on a generous basis—a Scot has nothing on a Chinese when it comes to money.

Mrs. Pym, wearing a camel's hair overcoat which gave her an impressive heaviness, crouched on the edge of the Wharf, studying the corpse. I knelt beside her, focusing the torch.

"That's a good coat she's wearing, though it's the wrong shade of mauve for a redhead and she's too big for the double-breasted style." Her blue-gray eyes glanced at me with faint malice. "One of her earrings has fallen off—see it, caught in the coat folds? Not there, you blind young ass—on the left side, where it's buttoned." I saw the gewgaw and nodded my comprehension. "I doubt if it means anything much. Oh, *we-tsen, we-tsen!*" The encroaching crowd moved back at the order. "Haul that painter up and let's see." Mrs. Pym paused. I had grabbed the rope, pulling its sodden, clammy length. At the end, attached with a bit of baling wire, was a bunch of ordinary red poppies, though the river had washed many of the heads away.

Mrs. Pym's snort was terrific.

"Is that supposed to be significant? Our thoughtful murderer! A coffin would have been more useful—here, give me those flowers." She wrapped them in the man's handkerchief she always carried, for though she was not that major horror, a masculine woman, she loathed the frail, feminine fripperies women are said to prefer.

"Won't there be trouble if you take those flowers?"

"Son, I've had trouble all my life. This is my case and I'll damn well handle it Pym fashion. I'm sick of chasing birds who sound their hooters after midnight—this time I'm having my own way." She turned at the tramp of feet on the road. Inspector Gaylor, that big, amiable police officer from Wicklow, was there with his squad. "Oh, it's you! Inspector, somebody stabbed a hole in Klara Dimmick, chucked her in this dinghy, and I'm handling the case—and no loopy S.M.C. councilor is going to stop me!"

Gaylor waved protestingly.

"Why, ma'am, would you have me comment?" His smile was infectious—at least I smiled back. "I'm only a poor cop, doing his duty. Now, why would I be wanting to take the case away from you?"

When the examination was over, Gaylor said, "Sort of thing a native would do."

"Native my foot!" Mrs. Pym gestured irately. "You never came across one of them with that kind of imagination—betcha million dollars you never did! No," she added, shaking the orthodox Gaylor to the roots, "we'll find the beginnings of this somewhere in our own sacred upper crust, and when I've finished, I'll teach that socially-elect jellyfish to swing something out of Nick Carter on me!"

Ernest Dimmick was roused from bed at two o'clock in the morning. He lived in a very respectable house opposite the French Club. It did not matter a row of native beans to Mrs. Pym that she was in the French Concession on her official occasions; she administered the law as it stood, and when it didn't she made personal adjustments.

The Number One boy brought him down, and Dimmick received us in the florid sitting room. He was a gentle little man, with brown hair and brown eyes behind thick-glassed spectacles. You could almost see Mrs. Pym wondering why meek, small men always marry massive women, seemingly chosen from the front row of the Valkyrie chorus.

"Good evening," said Dimmick, as politely as if he were receiving expected guests. The Shanghai papers had made a sensation out of Mrs. Pym's appointment to the S.M.P., so he knew his visitor. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I came about Mrs. Dimmick."

"Klara? Oh, yes. Er—perhaps there's something I can do—you see, my wife is at the Light Horse Ball."

"I see. Alone?"

"Oh, no. Won't you sit down? Drinks, perhaps?" Dimmick glanced at me helplessly in face of uncompromising refusals. "Mrs. Dimmick went with Mr. Thrane and his party. I felt somewhat unwell, so I did not go with them."

"Anything serious?"

"Serious?" Dimmick's brown eyes were anxious. "Oh, I see what you mean. No, nothing. A touch of dysentery, I think. I foolishly ate some Chinese melon two days ago. It was that, I imagine."

"What time did Mrs. Dimmick leave?"

"At six, I'm told. They were dining at the Palace, and going on to the Astor House for the Ball. Is there anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid there is." Bluntly, but not unkindly, she told him what had happened. Dimmick took it badly. He sank into an arm-

chair and covered his eyes with one hand, a gesture that would have looked theatrical in a more positive man.

"Mrs. Pym, I don't know what to say. I can't—can't think who would have done such a dreadful thing. And I never even saw her!"

"What do you mean?"

"I did not get home from the office till seven. She had already left. I haven't seen her since yesterday morning, and to think I might have spent the day . . ." There was nothing more we could do. We left little Dimmick with his grief.

Mrs. Pym owned a noisy red Bugatti, fast predecessor of the mechanical bullets she was to favor in later life. On the way back to the Settlement she drove with her customary violence.

"Went to a ball in a dark blue dress and a double-breasted coat!" Her sniff was devastating. "Dimmick's being taken for a sucker, if you ask me. Son—" she paused to bang the horn at a dawdling rickshaw coolie, cursing him liberally as she went by—"son, there's more in this than meets a blind cat's eye. Know anything about Klara?"

"Social, or otherwise?"

"Otherwise."

"Not much. She was a Klara Zimmermann before she married. Came from Tsingtao, where the Germans are. She's about thirty, I think. Got a good reputation. She's on the board of the Rickshawmen's Mission. I've never heard anything but good about her."

"Huh! That tells me what I want to know." The uncharitable remark was typical. "No children?" I shook my head. "My friend, if you ever want to be suspicious, then suspect a good German girl with a nice little husband when she has no children." She braked the Bugatti in front of central police headquarters. "Come on in. I'll see the dogs don't bite you."

Lights were burning, and there was an air of excitement. A murdered European was something apart from routine—the police station felt like my office when an exclusive story comes in. The Shanghai Municipal Council, in the form of the chairman, a tubby little man named Belper—he made half a million when he started the omnibus service—was there, throwing his weight about.

"This has got to be cleared up, and cleared up quick," he was telling gentle old Superintendent Laystall as we entered the general office. "Who the devil said that woman was to be in charge?"

"I said so." Mrs. Pym tramped across the boards, her eyes bleak and her hands deep in her coat pockets. Though she is of middle

height, she made Belper look small. "I found the body, and I'm in charge."

"Says who?" Belper wanted to know. "You haven't got your superior officer's permission, and the council won't stand for it."

"The council can lump it. Police procedure—"

"Police fiddlesticks!" Belper looked as if he would dance with rage. "This is a serious matter. I'm not going to—"

"No?" Her strong mouth became a thin line; I felt for Belper when her hands went on her hips. "Mr. Belper, I am a properly constituted law enforcement officer. I was there when the body of Klara Dimmick was found, and as a ranking C.I.D. detective I'm taking charge." She moved forward. Belper skipped towards Laystall, who was trying not to smile. "I don't give a minor hoot in hades for the S.M.C. I'm handling this case until I'm officially taken off it. You're chairman of the council, but in this office at this time you're an ordinary citizen. Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it: I'll call a meeting tomorrow and have you thrown out." Belper was livid. "I opposed your appointment in the first place, and I'm not going to stand for this!" He stormed towards the door, ridiculously like a cockerel. But he came to a halt and we saw his ears become bright red as Mrs. Pym said mildly:

"If you want to borrow my car, you may. You'll never get a taxi to Nadja Sherbina's little flat in Jessfield Park at this time of morning."

Belper went out quietly. Even Laystall laughed, later in the day, when he heard Belper had gone up-country on urgent business for a week.

But now the superintendent was not laughing.

"Mrs. Pym, you know that's no way to behave."

Her slight smile was frosty.

"No, sir. We girls get our tantrums." Her bleak eyes dared him to laugh at the feeble jest. "What about Klara?"

"Dr. Swann has seen the coroner and he'll be at work in the hour. We agreed on that, rather than wait till a more reasonable hour."

"What about identification, sir?"

"Her Number One boy is coming down. I spoke to Dimmick. He's upset—and you can't blame him. He thought the world of her. By the way, what were you doing in the French Concession?"

"Our friend here," Mrs. Pym waved to me without hesitation, "is a journalist and wanted to interview Dimmick. The least I could

do was give him a lift." She nodded as if pleased. "I'm not officially on duty, y'know."

"Aren't you?" Laystall was surprised. "I thought—"

"According to Belper, we don't think, sir, we're S.M.C. puppets. However, that's not important. D'you know anything about Klara Dimmick? Had she any lovers, or that sort of thing?" Mrs. Pym looked down her nose: she is no puritan, but she is a fastidious woman.

"Klara Dimmick!" Laystall was shocked. "Good Lord, no! Don't you go asking things like that or there really will be trouble. Why, she gave a thousand dollars to the Police Charity last November."

"Our friend here," she waved to me again, "told me she's the goddess of the Rickshawmen's Mission as well—a spreader of sweetness and light." Her eyes were sardonic. "Where does she get that much money—on Dimmick's pay?"

"He's Number Three man in China Oil," Laystall protested.

"He still wouldn't have that much to spare, not in Shanghai with a wife who wears imported Paris models."

"What about asking Stein? She banks with him," I suggested.

Mrs. Pym never wastes time asking how you know things. She got on the phone and routed Stein out of bed, which, as president of the New York-Oriental Banking Corporation, he resented.

"I'm sorry to spoil your beauty sleep." She briefly explained what had happened. "I'm asking you, unofficially, to tell me Klara Dimmick's position. Eh? A rich woman, is she?" Mrs. Pym listened and put down the receiver, turning to us. "Worth more than a hundred thousand, he says; usually banks about ten thousand a few times every year, in cash."

I whistled. "Smelly?"

Laystall was offended.

"I don't think you should talk like that about her. I've never heard a thing to her discredit."

Mrs. Pym shrugged.

"Superintendent, you've got a nice mind; I haven't. True virtue, as our native friends insist, shelters behind a polite palm: a parade of good works is intended to distract the eye from other, less virtuous, things."

There was nothing more to be done then. Mrs. Pym ran me home to my digs in Yangtzepoo, telling me I could tag along with her if I was at her flat not later than eight thirty—that meant turning in my story early. I didn't mind.

"It looks good," I said, climbing out of the Bugatti into the chill, faintly hot-oil-and-garlic atmosphere which is pure Shanghai background. "As a rule, you don't get out-and-out thrillers in China."

Mrs. Pym wrinkled her nose.

"Go to bed and dream, or do a little research, son. Shinaingan was writing first-class thrillers here—with fingerprints and all—when Edgar Allan Poe's ancestors were being seasick on the *May-flower*. Night-night."

Mrs. Pym's office was a small room at the top of police headquarters from which, if she felt like looking, she had a nice view of the S.M.C. building. Enthroned behind her neat, ancient desk, she permitted me to stay on the condition I took notes and kept my mouth shut. Her net had been cast ruthlessly, and before me was a list:

Johnnie Thrane
Elise Sartoris
Benjamin Cudworth
Lily Rogers
Ernest Dimmick
Fu Chwang
Dr. Swann
Morris Stein

The system of interviewing them was equally ruthless. Johnnie Thrane was first, and when he sat down, it was as if a breath of Bond Street had entered the drab office.

"Mr. Thrane, you will have seen the morning papers. I want you to tell me what happened last night."

Thrane bowed.

"There is so little to say, dear lady. Mrs. Dimmick, Mrs. Sartoris, Mrs. Rogers, Mr. Cudworth, and myself were a small dinner party. We dined at the Palace and reached the Astor House just before nine."

"You were in evening dress?"

"But naturally!" Thrane was shocked. "It was a most formal affair."

"I know my manners, too. Okay, carry on."

"We—ah—did the usual things," Thrane went on in a hurt voice.

"At ten Mrs. Dimmick was called to the telephone, and excused herself rather hurriedly."

"Why?"

"One of her protégés was ill. The dear lady was a great one for good works. We simply could not induce her to stay, and off she went."

Elise Sartoris, blonde and languid, substantiated the story, and so did the impeccable Lily Rogers, the Settlement's social leader. Little Benjamin Cudworth, who was always broke but whose connections were blue-blooded, added that Mrs. Dimmick had mentioned she would have to "pop home and change."

Ernest Dimmick admitted he had gone over to the French Club to look at the snooker, and must have missed his wife when she came in.

"I'm not surprised to hear your story," he told Mrs. Pym during his second interview. "Klara had only two passions in life—her benevolent institutions and the works of Richard Wagner. I am not being disloyal but they were, perhaps, almost more important than our—ah—married life. . . ."

Fu Chwang, his Number One houseboy, admitted that since his master was out, he was out, too—an old China custom.

"Master and mississy no have got. My pay talkee my mama."

"What side mama b'long?" Mrs. Pym wanted to know.

"B'long amah, Tracey Terrace-side. My go maybe one hour."

"You saw your mississy?"

Fu Chwang shook his head. "My cousin b'long rickshaw-coolie. Talkee me mississy ride him rickshaw. Catchee house ten o'clock. Catchee diffrent clothes, then she go."

"What side?"

"Zeh-lok-phoo, Zikawe Creek-side."

"The end of the French Bund at Siccawei Creek?" Mrs. Pym was surprised. "How fashion what thing?"

"No savvy." Fu Chwang shrugged. "Catchee tall blown house that side. My cousin he talkee me mississy pay him small money. He say, no good, fare one dollah Mex. Wanchee big money. Mississy say 'yeu-tse, yeu-tse!' Very unkind."

"She'd paid enough, had she?" Mrs. Pym turned to me. "Gave the poor devil dimes, obviously."* She dismissed Fu Chwang when

*In those days, ten dimes legally equaled a dollar Mex, but local exchange was such that for a silver dollar one could get anything from ten to fourteen dimes in an exchange bureau, or, in copper, up to nearly two hundred pennies.

she found that his cousin had not followed Klara Dimmick, after the usual fashion of a swindled coolie.

In the time-honored way of all police surgeons, Swann bustled in as if devils were after him.

"Got an appointment," he announced, leaning heavily on his brown leather workcase placed on the edge of the desk. "The corpse was well nourished and all that. Died of a knife thrust. Dead very few hours when I saw her." He twinkled because he liked Mrs. Pym.

"No exciting news?"

"No. With exposure to cold, then being messed about and brought into hot places—well, how can I give any time?"

"No, I see that."

"Nice of you," Swann nodded cheerfully. "Well-built, full-blooded German wench with years of life in her—her mortal twain was nearly cut and now she's buried in a rut . . . or soon will be." Swann beamed. He was given to those appalling homemade couplets. Mrs. Pym smiled in a sour manner and sat back to wait for Morris Stein.

He was the most unhelpful of the lot. Private bankers in the Far East, then, had never made up their minds if they equaled God or a mere archangel. Stein belonged to the former school.

He answered Mrs. Pym's questions guardedly. No, he did not know where she got those sums of regular cash she deposited. They were always in twenties, fifties, and hundreds.

Mrs. Pym glared at the stout and impatient banker.

"Look here, Stein, I don't give a copper cash if you're the biggest gun in the Settlement—and there isn't one of your lot who wouldn't steal the wool off the Lamb of God, if he got the chance. I want to know where Klara got that money!"

Stein, purpled.

"Mrs. Pym, I'll have you—"

"Oh, bosh. Bankers know everything about their clients. Where did she get it?"

"If I knew, I couldn't reveal professional secrets."

"Professional twiddle! This is a police office and I want your help. Look, friend, shall I tell this lad here—he's a reporter—that you cleared a million running guns up to Mukden for Chang Tso-lin?"

The banker gestured hurriedly.

"Rank libel! I told you I don't know anything. Mrs. Dimmick married an important man. Maybe it wasn't the best of marriages; he's only a runt, after all, and she's a fine woman, or was. There's

not a breath of scandal associated with her name."

She let Stein ramble on and dismissed him, ignoring his threats.

"We're nowhere, son," she told me. "Problem is, who killed that lily-white child? I don't believe in whitewash, and if nothing else, swindling that coolie out of a few dimes convinces me. She's hiding something, and that something is big. Wait a tick." She grabbed the phone and talked to Lorrie Bala, head of China Oil.

Lorrie, who was an Armenian, believed in nothing that was not good legal currency.

"Yes, I know about Dimmick," he said. "Klara? A nice woman. Yes. Did lots of good, wasting money, too, on tramps. Happy? Well, you might say, but she played him around a bit. He is a frustrated little perisher, but Ernie adored her. I don't think she'd risk a lover, but it puzzles me. You know these—well . . . but I never heard anything wrong about her."

Slightly pink, Mrs. Pym told me the story, adding:

"I just don't get it."

"Maybe she *was* a good woman? Maybe it was robbers, or something?"

"Laid her out in a dinghy and hung flowers on it? Don't be so damn silly. It was a man, and a white man."

"It might've been a woman, surely?"

"It was a man and you're blind if you can't see that. The answer's—hell, I'm slipping! Get a wiggle on—we're going to be busy."

The Bugatti went hurtling through the crowded streets. Mrs. Pym always drives as if she's one minute ahead of death. This time she rounded the Bund corner on two wheels, dodging rickshaws, great barrows with their "hi-yah"-ing coolies, and cars, with inspired directness. We raced across the French Concession and reached Siccawei Creek in nine minutes flat from police headquarters, which was impossible.

She walked to a gaunt brown house in Zeh-lok-phoo with a little painted sign of a bunch of red poppies over the door. I thought all sorts of things in puzzled wonder.

She spent, she told me, thirty minutes interviewing a stout and unpleasant man named Chow Ling, a typically squat Cantonese. He was not prepared to talk, and once, waiting outside, I heard a muted yell. It worried me. She is never gentle with people who keep their mouths shut when she wants information.

"He wouldn't talk," she explained, when we were haring back to

the Settlement. Her eyes were hard. "So I made him."

"How?"

"Proposed to light a little fire on his chest. When that didn't work, he'd spiked my guns. So I found a kitchen knife and made big play that I'd cut off one of his arms." Her eyes were icy. "I'd have been in a hell of a mess if he kept holding out on me! But he talked—there never was a Chinese who'd stand up to the idea of going to his eventual grave with an incomplete body."

"Ah! Did you get anything?"

"What d'you think?"

Superintendent Laystall saw her in his office. He was nice enough to let me be present, on the condition that he saw my story when I'd written it.

Mrs. Pym was cock-a-hoop, even though her face was almost stony.

"Dirty, filthy case, every bit of it." She frowned at me as if she didn't like my being there. "You and your angelic Klara!" She seemed to be addressing the whole of Shanghai. "A cold and frigid woman to that poor little husband of hers, and as moral as an alley cat outside the house!"

Laystall was shocked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Granted. Do you know what? Klara Dimmick owned Chow Ling's calling-house! Yes, my gullible and credulous friends—a brothel! That's where she got the cash."

I was shaken. I knew of Chow Ling's only by hearsay—a discreet, exclusive establishment where all the girls were white and desperately expensive. Its watchword was complete anonymity and, being in the Chinese City, it could not be touched by the law, for it obviously paid plenty of local *cumshaw*.

"She *owned* it?" Laystall was almost incoherent.

"And she was the highest-priced article there." Mrs. Pym glowered awfully. She is a nice-minded woman, and I could see that she hated telling this story. "It's all been kept very quiet." She told us something of the place.

When Laystall had recovered, he asked another question.

"You've found out who killed her?"

"Easily. I told our friend here it was a man when I saw her coat buttoned up, man-fashion."

"And the man?"

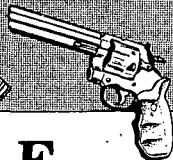
"One of her intimate circle—one of those who, like this whole damned town, thought she was an angel."

"Yes?"

"What would you do," she asked Laystall in a different voice, "if you brought yourself to go to one of those places, telephoned, ordered the best in the house—" Mrs. Pym frowned heavily "—and then found yourself in the room *with your own wife?*"

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Sometimes books seem to arrive in “themes.” This month practically every book I picked up was set in Massachusetts or was related to Massachusetts in some way. For example, W. R. Philbrick has written a fourth J. D. Hawkins Nantucket mystery, **Walk on the Water** (St. Martin’s, \$15.95, 215 pp). Crime writer Hawkins is about to help his friend and lover Meg, who in her job as an editor has accepted and promoted a book by one Fiona Darling. Now the estate of macho crime writer Howard Holton has sued Fiona and Meg’s employer, alleging plagiarism. Since Holton committed suicide by walking into the surf at Nantucket, and since Hawkins is presently blocked on his latest book, an investigation at the “scene of the crime” seems an appropriate move. Hawkins’ New England roots enhance the possibility that he can unravel the reasons behind the suit, clear Fiona, and keep Meg employed.

Douglas Kiker is well known as a former television news correspondent. His book **Death Below Deck** (Random House, \$18.00, 229 pp) has nothing to do with television, however—his hero, Mac MacFarland, is a down-and-out newspaperman. Now living in Cape Cod, Mac is invited by an old colleague (and one-time lover) for morning coffee. The invitation leads to the discovery of a corpse and the subsequent investigation of murder in high society. This is the third Mac MacFarland novel, and we learn even more about

his past (and present) difficulties with the women in his life as he investigates his old friend's family and business ventures.

Philip R. Craig's **The Woman Who Walked into the Sea** (Scribners, \$17.95, 215 pp) is set in Martha's Vineyard and stars Jeff Jackson, Vineyard resident, former Boston cop, and present fisherman. Jeff is having trouble keeping his girl Zee—Zee has fallen for the sexy academic renting the house next door. And Jeff is not sure how to fight for her without appearing too rough and tumble or possessive—things he knows will drive Zee away. So he decides to let the romance run its course, hoping it will be short-lived. Unfortunately, the academic's professional colleague and companion, a respected researcher and avid swimmer, is found drowned. Is it an accident? Suicide? Or murder? In order to investigate, Jeff must interfere with Zee and her new love, perhaps alienating her forever. A nice second in the series, which started with *A Beautiful Place to Die*.

Jeremiah Healy's John Cuddy, P.I. series returns with **Right to Die** (Pocket, \$19.95, 248 pp). Cuddy is asked by old friend Tommy Kramer, an attorney, to talk to AIDS activist Alec Bacall, who in turn wants Cuddy to investigate some threats being received by right-to-die activist Maisy Andrus. Bacall thinks Cuddy might be interested because Cuddy had to watch his wife die slowly and painfully from cancer; Kramer thinks there might be an old school tie, since Andrus is now teaching at Cuddy's former law school (Cuddy never graduated). Cuddy finds neither reason sufficient—he is more convinced by Bacall's sincerity and by the strong feelings on the part of Andrus's secretary Ines, who has been opening the professor's mail. All the while Cuddy is investigating, he is training, with the help of a perfectly charming (and anonymous) street person, for his first Boston marathon. Cuddy's relationships with his "coach," his present lady, assistant D.A. Nancy Meagher, and his dead wife (with whom he carries on perfectly believable discussions) really make this book.

Ronald Munson also has a book set in Boston—**Nothing Human** (Pocket, \$19.95, 248 pp). Lieutenant Eric Firecaster has discovered a serial killer, one who mutilates the bodies of his victims and keeps the heads as "trophies." The killer calls himself "the Jaguar" and threatens his victims prior to the killing. The next victim is Jill Brenner, a freelance writer and a woman who has a very strong attraction to Firecaster. The story is told from the points of view of Jill, Firecaster, and the killer, bringing the three to an ultimate violent faceoff. With several gruesomely graphic scenes much in

the style of Thomas Harris, this book is not for the queasy; it is gripping but leaves the reader drained as he or she follows the inexorable crescendo to the climax that must follow.

While not exactly set in Massachusetts, Jane Langton's latest, **The Dante Game** (Viking, \$18.95, 325 pp), has its roots there—after all, Homer Kelly is a Harvard professor, and the little school operated from the rundown villa on the outskirts of Florence is sponsored by a Massachusetts foundation. In fact, *The Dante Game* is a little bit of Massachusetts transplanted to Florence, where several students, under the direction of Kelly (among others), study modern and ancient Florentine literature, architecture, and art for a “year abroad.” When some of the local help are found murdered on the villa's grounds, Homer is at a disadvantage; he knows very little Italian. Nonetheless, he is drawn into the investigation when a student disappears, drugs are found on the premises, and a professor is accused of murder. Illustrated charmingly by Ms. Langton, *The Dante Game* is full of wit and atmosphere and teaches the reader about Dante, Florence, and murder.

Another theme this month appears to be “true crime,” but in fiction. D. F. Mills's third book, **Deadline** (Diamond Books, no price given, 258 pp), stars Tess Alexander, a freelance Texas author who has recently hit it big with true crime novels. When her publisher asks her to write up a case that seems made to order—the arson/murder trial of a former governor of Texas who lives near Tess's hometown—she has strange misgivings. These misgivings seem to be borne out as she encounters hostility from her younger sister, confusion from her Alzheimer's-afflicted mother, and threatening notes from an unknown source. Tess's own history gets interwoven into the story she is writing about a politician who may have murdered his wife, daughter, and grandchild for the insurance money.

Michael Mewshaw also has a true crime author personally involved in an investigation of murder in **True Crime** (Poseidon, \$19.95, 288 pp). Tom Hiller, Jr., gets a late night call from his brother telling him that his father, Tom, Sr., has been shot. Hiller rushes home to his father's deathbed to encounter familial hostility—his long-term residence in Rome is a major sticking point. Things really heat up, however, when the father and son of an old girlfriend are murdered and the girlfriend is accused. In the course of writing the book, Heller uses his investigation to get even with a number of individuals who have haunted his memories, only to find that getting even may not be the best revenge.

Lillian O'Donnell's **Norah Mulcahaney** returns in **A Private Crime** (Putnam, \$19.95, 239 pp). Norah is barely over the death of her husband and her latest "boyfriend," newcaster Randall Tye, has disappeared after a disagreement between them regarding one of his stories. He has made accusations on the air about the cause of death in a case Norah is in charge of, and Norah disagrees, not only with his conclusions but also with his methods. Norah and her homicide team must solve the case while settling their own private struggles.

Ralph McInerny, author of the Father Dowling series, has a new series in the making with **The Search Committee** (Atheneum, \$18.95, 243 pp). In this, his third Matthew Rogerson story (the previous two being *Jolly Rogerson* and *Rogerson at Bay*), an old fashioned professor of traditional coursework at the Fort Elbow campus of the University of Ohio (a fictional campus of a fictional college) is embroiled in an academic crisis. The school's chancellor has been arrested and subsequently suspended for drunk driving; a committee's search for his replacement leads to the murder of the leading contenders. Rogerson's sole ambition—to solve the murder without being named acting chancellor!

David Delman's **The Last Gambit** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 169 pp) pits Chicago Homicide Lieutenant Jacob Horowitz, amateur chessman, against murder at a world class chess tournament. The murder is that of chess master Dmitri Kaganovitch, American by birth and inclination but Russian by citizenship (his disgruntled parents hauled him back to Russia, where they felt more politically at home). Dmitri left Russia as soon as he could, using his chess skills as his passport, but he hasn't resolved some basic conflicts between his lifestyle and his chess. At the same time, Horowitz must play in the tournament in the lowest ranks, eventually facing his local arch-enemy and fellow club member—a man who would do anything to humiliate Horowitz, and would delight to do it in such a public arena as the chess competition.

The late Jeanne Hart's **Threnody for Two** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 181 pp) brings to a premature end the series featuring Detective Carl Pedersen of Bay Cove, California. Carl has two bizarre knife murders on his hands—one a bag lady and the other a wealthy widow. Other than the similarity of the knifings, there appears to be no connection. But there seems to be more to both murders than meets the eye, and Pedersen soon begins to find connections—between the murders and between the two women.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



Ambition, written by actor Lou Diamond Phillips, is the story of an unpublished author who decides to befriend a paroled psychopathic killer in the hope of creating a juicy bestseller. Phillips also stars as the humorless writer, Mitchell Os-good, who manages a bookstore in order to make ends meet.

Not only does he have a growing pile of rejection notices from publishers, Mitchell is also burdened by his increasingly ill Filipino father (Haing S. Ngor), who refuses medical help, won't acknowledge his son's desire to be a writer, and berates him for changing his name from Domingo to Mitchell. He further suffers the misfortune of having a successful, loving, and very attractive girlfriend (Cecelia Peck). You'd almost think this guy would be walking around hunched over

from the very large chip he carries on his shoulder.

Tangle this high-strung would-be writer with Albert Merrick (Clancy Brown), a man dubbed the "Valentine's Day Slasher," and the mix is volatile. But the stuff of bestsellers or great movies? Not exactly. At least not in the hands of Lou Diamond Phillips and his amateurish, clichéd dialogue. It becomes almost comical when Phillips' character insists to his father, "I am a good writer, I am a good writer." Clearly, the off-screen Phillips is not.

Despite being warned off by Albert's crusty parole officer (Richard Bradford), Mitchell follows the killer out of prison to the seedy new hotel room the state has found for him. Actually, it's not really that seedy. Albert does have to flush a few roaches down the toilet. But the sparsely furnished one bed-

room apartment has lots of windows and lots of light and looks quite desirable by many urban standards. It is simply at odds with the mood being created.

To get close to Albert, Mitchell gives him a job at his bookstore, a store that features a vivid display of a new book about the Valentine's Day Slasher. Since the killer has no friends, it is easy for Mitchell to insinuate himself into Albert's life for his own purposes. Mitchell hopes to manipulate his killer buddy into killing again and then to write about it.

As it's played out on the screen, *Ambition* is something of a twisted, less-successful version of Stephen King's *Misery*.

In the suspenseful, well-acted *Misery*, a successful writer is held captive by an obsessed fan whose help he needs to recover from injuries sustained in an auto accident. That writer fooled his captor by emptying the pills she gave him of their medication. Phillips' character doctors the lithium pills Albert takes in order to keep him from losing control.

Phillips, however, pokes fun at the talented and prolific King at every opportunity. When the latest King book ar-

rives at the shop, he cries that it's been a full week since King's last book came in.

But Lou Diamond Phillips is no Stephen King.

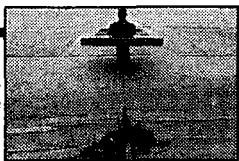
Clancy Brown, as the killer, does a good job. At first he appears tentative, a gentle giant hoping to make good. But as he is manipulated by his "friend," he acquires a scary, nervous edge with a hair trigger. Phillips, with his trendy long hair, is all style and little substance. In a potentially intense role, his attempts at intensity range from squinting his eyes to frowning his brow. Richard Bradford, as the parole officer, is an enjoyable Brian Dennehy knockoff. Willard Pugh is delightful as the bookstore clerk who provides intentional and welcome comic relief to the heavy-handedness of his boss.

Some elements of *Ambition* make one wish it had been in better hands. But Phillips' ambition, particularly as a screenwriter, is apparently greater than his talent to execute it.

The most taut and suspenseful portion of the film, unfortunately, is saved for the last five minutes. Had the rest of the film worked as well, it would not have been such a tedious undertaking.

THE STORY THAT WON

The May Mysterious Photo-Jan Streilein of Johnstown, mentions go to Lawrence South Carolina; Perry E. gan; David Bart of Albuquerque of Young's Point, Ontario, Canada; Stuart Brynien of Brooklyn, New York; Michael Boyles of San Diego, California; Elliott Reiss of Keller, Texas; Jack M. Abbott of Bradley, California; Traci Schuyler of San Luis Obispo, California; Robert G. Stewart of Oakland, California; Margaret T. Mawhinney of Washington, Pennsylvania; and Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia.



graph contest was won by Pennsylvania. Honorable Thackston of Orangeburg, Pariseau of Owosso, Michigan, New Mexico; Bob Wynn of Young's Point, Ontario, Canada; Stuart Brynien of Brooklyn, New York; Michael Boyles of San Diego, California; Elliott Reiss of Keller, Texas; Jack M. Abbott of Bradley, California; Traci Schuyler of San Luis Obispo, California; Robert G. Stewart of Oakland, California; Margaret T. Mawhinney of Washington, Pennsylvania; and Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia.

Photo by Altimontas Kezys

THE BUST by Jan Streilein

"Good morning, officers. I called this emergency briefing to comply with a directive from the mayor's office.

"For the past thirteen weeks, someone has been reducing the statues of famous authors to ashes. The picture on the screen is the latest, which the newspapers have captioned, 'The Charred Bard.'

"Although this vandalism has not resulted in any injuries to the public, City Council considers the situation dangerous and costly. They want us to stake out the few remaining artifacts in town.

"We believe the perpetrator to be Frank 'Porky' Stanton, but we have no evidence to support that theory. For you rookies, Frank's specialty is destruction. A few years ago he plowed up the park in front of the post office, hosed it down, then unloaded a truck full of hogs to wallow in the mud. It took two years to restore the lawn.

"Later he greased a dozen pigs and stampeded them through Perkins' Glassworks. The place was shattered . . . no pun intended.

"Anyway, the bronze victims are posted on the board in the order they were hit. Tarkenton, Hardy, Alcott, Tennyson, Stowe, Austen, Lawrence, London, Ferber, Orwell, Longfellow, Kipling and Shakespeare."

"Chief, I don't think you need to worry about any future incidents, and we're looking at a clue right now."

"What's that, Wilson?"

"Just underscore the capital letters on the list."

(Go ahead, try it!)

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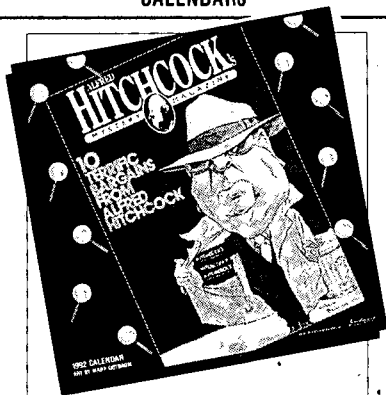
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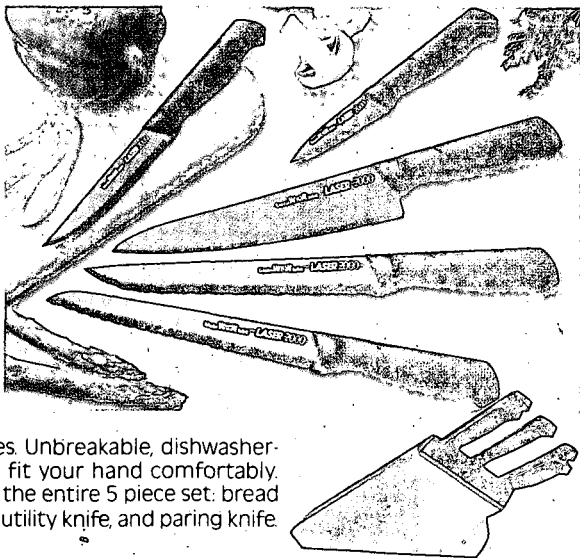
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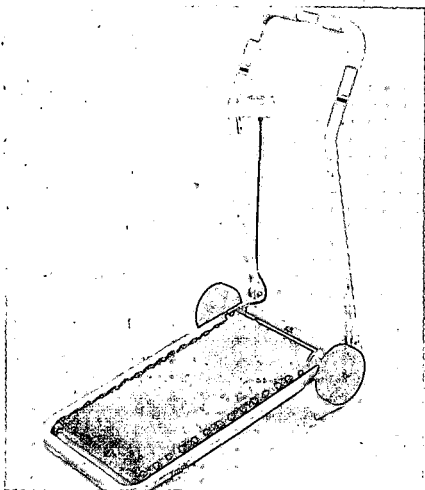
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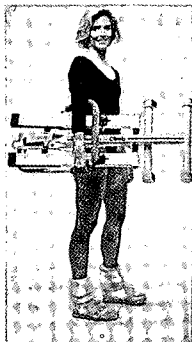
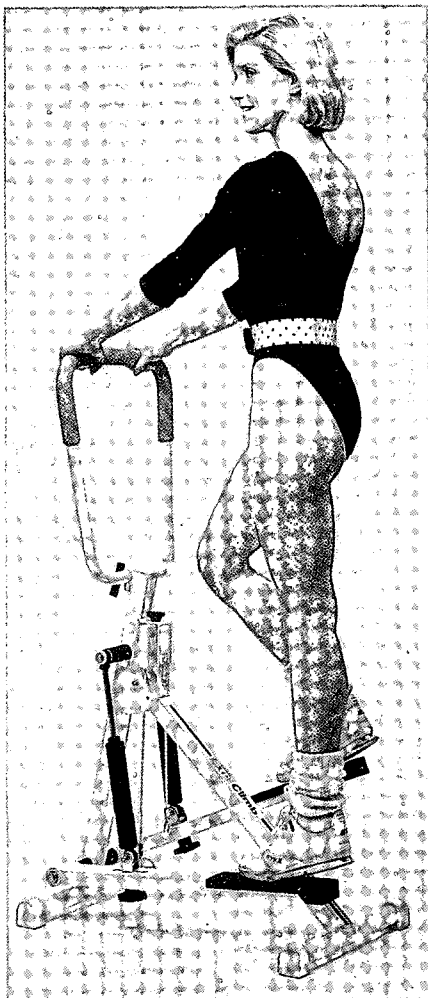


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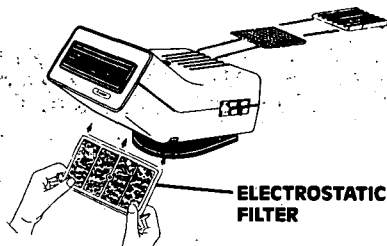
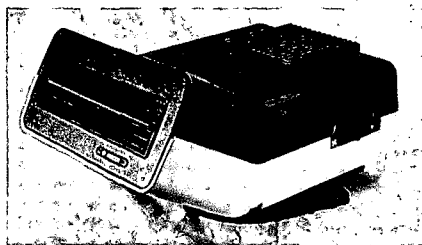


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